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ABSTRACT

Linked with professional development programs to support the implementation of Te Whariki, the national early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, a project was designed to: (1) construct a framework for assessment and evaluation in early childhood programs in Aotearoe-New Zealand; and (2) use this framework to develop an evaluation process through an action research trial in six early childhood centers. This report sets the context of the research project, outlines the theoretical foundations and the methodological approach, summarizes and synthesizes the data, and suggests some overview issues and implications for self-evaluation processes in early childhood centers. The action research trial used learning and teaching stories, narrative reflections used by teachers and practitioners to assess children and evaluate programs within their own centers over the course of one year. The trial found that center staff varied in their knowledge and confidence about Te Whariki. The learning and teaching story framework was useful in understanding the curriculum, and using the framework changed staff behaviors with, and attitudes toward, children and parents. Involving management and large number of parents in the process proved administratively complex. The project served to expand on the idea that evaluation of early childhood programs should be grounded in quality from the child's perspective. A number of key features of the action research process, as a process for self-evaluation, emerged. (Ten appendices include a project flyer, information on research dissemination, links between evaluation projects, and an outline of the assessment/evaluation framework. Contains 78 references.) (KB)

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ED 447 930

LEARNING AND TEACHING STORIES: ACTION RESEARCH ON EVALUATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

FINAL REPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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LEARNING AND TEACHING STORIES: ACTION RESEARCH ON EVALUATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

FINAL REPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was designed to:

1. Construct an overall framework for assessment and evaluation in early childhood programmes in Aotearoa-New Zealand, by combining the foundation work of Margaret Carr's Ministry of Education research project *Assessing Children's Experiences* (1998a), and Val Podmore and Helen May's Ministry of Education project *Evaluating Programmes Using the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki* (1998).
2. Use this framework to develop an evaluation process through an action research trial in a small range of early childhood centres.

The report sets the context of the research project; outlines the theoretical foundations and the methodological approach; summarises and synthesises the data; and suggests some overview issues and implications for self-evaluation processes in early childhood centres. It should provide the foundation for a future resource for professional development educators and practitioners interested in the framework trialled in this project. The report's focus is on the research context of this work.

This research occurred parallel to, but linked with, continuing professional development programmes to support the implementation of Te Whāriki, the national curriculum. A first premise of the research project is that assessment and evaluation are entwined. The preceding phases of the research established the principle that assessment for children is "holistic and empowering", and that evaluation is about relationships with adults which are "responsive reciprocal and respectful" (the "three Rs"). A second premise is that assessment and evaluation are an integral part of implementing Te Whāriki as a living curriculum in early childhood programmes. This research was needed, both to develop and trial approaches that could be useful for practitioners and meaningful in relation to the Principles, Strands, and Goals of Te Whāriki.

The intention was to trial the framework for assessment and evaluation, using the tools of "Learning and Teaching Stories", which are observational and narrative reflections for use by teachers and practitioners to assess children and evaluate programmes within their own centres. An action research process was used to trial the framework in a range of early childhood centres in New Zealand.

The project draws on the action research framework of Kemmis and McTaggart (1998), and on approaches used in related New Zealand studies, to implement an action research spiral process.

Three preparatory tasks were to:

- confirm the framework developed in the evaluation project as the basis for the action research trial (Podmore & May with Mara, 1998),
- simplify "the child's questions" developed in the evaluation project,
- develop evaluative tools for trialling during an action research process.

The "child's questions", linked to each Strand of Te Whāriki, in their full and simplified forms are:

Belonging: "Do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?" ("Do you know me?")

Well-being: "Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?" ("Can I trust you?")

Exploration: "Do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world?" ("Do you let me fly?")

Communication: "Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts?" ("Do you hear me?")

Contribution: "Do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the wider group?" ("Is this place fair for us?")

The "child's voice" questions provided the initial questions that centres asked of themselves as they began their journey of evaluation. The approaches developed and trialled were a selection of evaluation and assessment strategies described as action research tools. Examples of possible tools were prepared.

A set of principles was developed as a guideline for the construction of action research tools. These principles were developed further as "criteria of merit" from which practitioners and researchers could judge the value of the action research tools that they trialled. For each action research tool, the practitioners and researchers discussed eight questions pertaining to merit. These questions reflect standards or types of validity for formative and local action research tools for self-evaluation. Many of the tools included observations, and the data are qualitative or interpretive in form.

Questions about utility or merit were derived from:

- the standards developed for formative assessment procedures in authentic curriculum-based approaches that have been developed by Bagnato (1997) for early intervention (sensitivity, authenticity, equity, collaboration, convergence, and congruence);
- the three elements of validity outlined in Gee and Green (1998) for discourse analysis and ethnographic perspectives (coverage, convergence, and agreement);
- the types of validity developed by Anderson and Herr (1999) for practitioner research (catalytic validity).

In addition, the researchers added three more standards or types of validity for interpretive data: (challenge, accessibility, and leverage).

The action research used to trial this approach was sited in three geographic locations. In each region, the project operated alongside a Ministry of Education professional development contract. Early childhood centre participants worked with an action research facilitator. The sample comprises two playcentres, two kindergartens, and two childcare centres.

Practitioners in the centres chose a child's question, then selected, adapted, or devised a self-evaluation action research tool for gathering data. Then they observed, reflected, planned, and acted (in varying order). The report describes how the process of the action research moves from Learning Stories to Teaching Stories. At the conclusion of the trialling of the action research tools, the research facilitators interviewed the participating practitioners. These interviews included some discussion of the eight questions that were developed to evaluate each research tool.

Finally, it was intended that, in a cycle of evaluation, the centres' practitioners would put in place structures, systems, and processes as appropriate to improve the implementation of Te Whāriki, and consequently enhance children's experiences.

The research facilitator responsible developed a summary report and a full draft case study of the early childhood centre, in consultation with the centre's participants and the project directors. These summaries included in this report outline the context and philosophy of the centre, and report on the strategies adopted and trialled during the action research process.

Participants from all of the centres were keen to take part in the research trial; the centres remained in the study for the full year, and at the end of the year the participants felt that the process was only really beginning. A key motivator was that senior practitioners were generally anxious about increasing requirements for accountability and saw a need for assessment and evaluation processes that were both useful and efficient. The dynamics of the action research process were quite different for each centre. Some general statements about the process are made in relation to:

Knowledge about and confidence with Te Whāriki: In some centres, highly trained staff who had some knowledge and confidence about Te Whāriki implemented the framework with considerable understanding, insight, and excitement about what they were learning about children, and were then planning accordingly. In other centres, less confident staff required more guidance from the action research facilitators and covered less ground, but also felt a growing confidence and excitement and were moving towards planning decisions. The Learning and Teaching Story framework was a useful way of coming to know about and understand Te Whāriki.

The process of change: Using the framework changed staff behaviours with, and attitudes towards, children and parents. There were variations across centres in the extent to which practitioners felt sufficiently confident to appraise and "question" their role as adults. Beginning with the focus on children using Learning Stories was a safer option for some centres, but participants at all centres moved to apply the "children's questions" in a range of contexts. The action research process generated valuable opportunities for discussion and debate.

Constraints: Trying to involve all practitioners and in particular large numbers of parents in the process was administratively complex. Centres with practitioners who were less confident might not use the framework without the support and "discipline" provided by an outsider. Participants were not always able to incorporate management effectively as part of the action research cycle. There remains scope in the future to include management in the process, using the framework.

Participants at the six centres trialled a number of action research tools for self-evaluation. Later the practitioners, together with the research facilitator, evaluated the tools themselves.

The most successful tools in relation to eight questions were those that:

- generated the most reflective discussion: they challenged assumptions, they did not "put staff down", they provided data that make sense;
- could be translated into a chart, an accessible and easily read evaluation where the data could graphically reflect change;

- spoke to the interests of the staff and community;
- included peer observations of each other in an atmosphere of trust; some tools included a recommendation that an external "critical friend" would be a useful evaluator; and
- included early discussions and agreement about the criteria involved.

The project addressed two research questions. The first question concerned the key features of programme quality in relation to the strands and goals of Te Whāriki, which should be the focus of evaluation practice. The project developed the idea that evaluation of an early childhood programme should be grounded in quality from the *child's perspective*. That perspective was articulated as five *child's questions* that reflected the five strands of curriculum in Te Whāriki. The second question was concerned with ways in which these features can be implemented into a framework for curriculum evaluation. This was answered by the development of the idea of *action research self-evaluation tools* that programmes could choose from and adapt to accommodate local contexts.

A number of these tools were trialled, and although a proportion of these received a judgment of high merit (using eight criteria or standards of merit) from practitioners and researchers, the outcome of the project is to do with the process of evaluation as action research rather than with the development of a finite set of self-evaluation tools. The development of these as a resource for practitioners is envisioned as a follow-on project to this one. A number of key features of the action research process as a process for self-evaluation emerged during the project.

The report outlines the alignments between the Learning and Teaching Stories approach to self-evaluation and the Ministry of Education's *Quality Journey*. Finally, it provides suggestions for future research, and highlights the importance of developing a resource for practitioners based on the present project.

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We acknowledge the extensive contributions to this project of the three action research facilitators: Pam Cubey, Ann Hatherly, and Bernadette Macartney. Each research facilitator worked with two early childhood centres for a number of months during 1998 and 1999, constructed in-depth case studies of the centres, and prepared draft summary reports of the centres for chapter 3 of this report.

The participation of the six early childhood centres was invaluable to the project. We appreciated the input from the participants from the two childcare centres, two kindergartens, and two playcentres. Pseudonyms are used for all participants mentioned in the report.

This research was funded on contract to the Ministry of Education, and we acknowledge the Ministry's support. We are grateful to the members of the project's advisory committee who provided useful feedback and comments during the project. We also acknowledge the co-operation of the College of Education professional development teams working alongside the project.

Teachers in the audiences at our seminars and presentations provided useful suggestions and encouragement. The project has also benefited from our international contacts, and we appreciate the continuing communication with our overseas colleagues.

This is a collaborative project by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, the Institute for Early Childhood Studies (Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington College of Education), and the University of Waikato.

Margaret Carr, Helen May, and Val Podmore
November, 1999

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> ***Educators should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the learning and development of each child, identifying learning goals for individual children, and use this information as a basis for planning, evaluating and improving curriculum.*** DOP 3 (Ministry of Education, 1996a)

Aims

This project was designed to:

1. Construct an overall framework for assessment and evaluation in early childhood programmes in Aotearoa-New Zealand, by combining the foundation work of Margaret Carr's Ministry of Education research project *Assessing Children's Experiences* (1998a), and Val Podmore and Helen May's Ministry of Education project *Evaluating Programmes Using the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki* (1998).
2. Use this framework to develop an evaluation process through an action research trial in a small range of early childhood centres.

(*See* appendix A: Project flyer *Learning and Teaching Stories*)

Focus of the Report

This report sets the context of the research project; outlines the theoretical foundations and the methodological approach; summarises and synthesises the data; and suggests some overview issues and implications for self-evaluation processes in early childhood centres. It should provide the foundation for a future resource for professional development educators and practitioners interested in the framework trialled in this project. The report's focus is on the research context of this work. A follow-on phase for a useful resource is under discussion.

Research History

Diagram 1: *History of the Project* positions this particular research project as part of a progression of research projects involving the authors, and originating in the Curriculum Development Project 1991–92 co-ordinated by Margaret Carr and Helen May (Carr & May, 1992). This research has occurred parallel to, but linked with, continuing professional development programmes to support the implementation of Te Whāriki, the national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996b).

A first premise of the research projects is that assessment and evaluation are entwined. An early illustrative model of this process was developed during the evaluation project (1997–98). (*See* appendix B: *A Holistic Framework for Evaluation and Assessment*.) This establishes the principle that assessment for children is "holistic and empowering", and that

evaluation is about relationships with adults which are "responsive reciprocal and respectful" (the "three Rs").

A second premise is that assessment and evaluation are an integral part of implementing Te Whāriki as a living curriculum in early childhood programmes. Assessment and evaluation, therefore, are not "add-ons" or something separate. Moreover, research was needed, both to develop and trial approaches that could be useful for practitioners and meaningful in relation to the Principles, Strands, and Goals of Te Whāriki. As a consequence, the development of resources for practitioners has been an aim of the researchers. A series of assessment videos (Carr, 1998b) are already in wide circulation. A resource for evaluation is a follow-on aim from this project.

There were three contexts surrounding the present research. These were the:

- political context of national curriculum quality improvement in education and early childhood institutions;
- pedagogical context provided by the "Learning and Teaching Story" Framework in relation to Te Whāriki as New Zealand's curriculum framework; and
- theoretical context using the "child's questions" as a beginning to the process of self-evaluation in this trial.

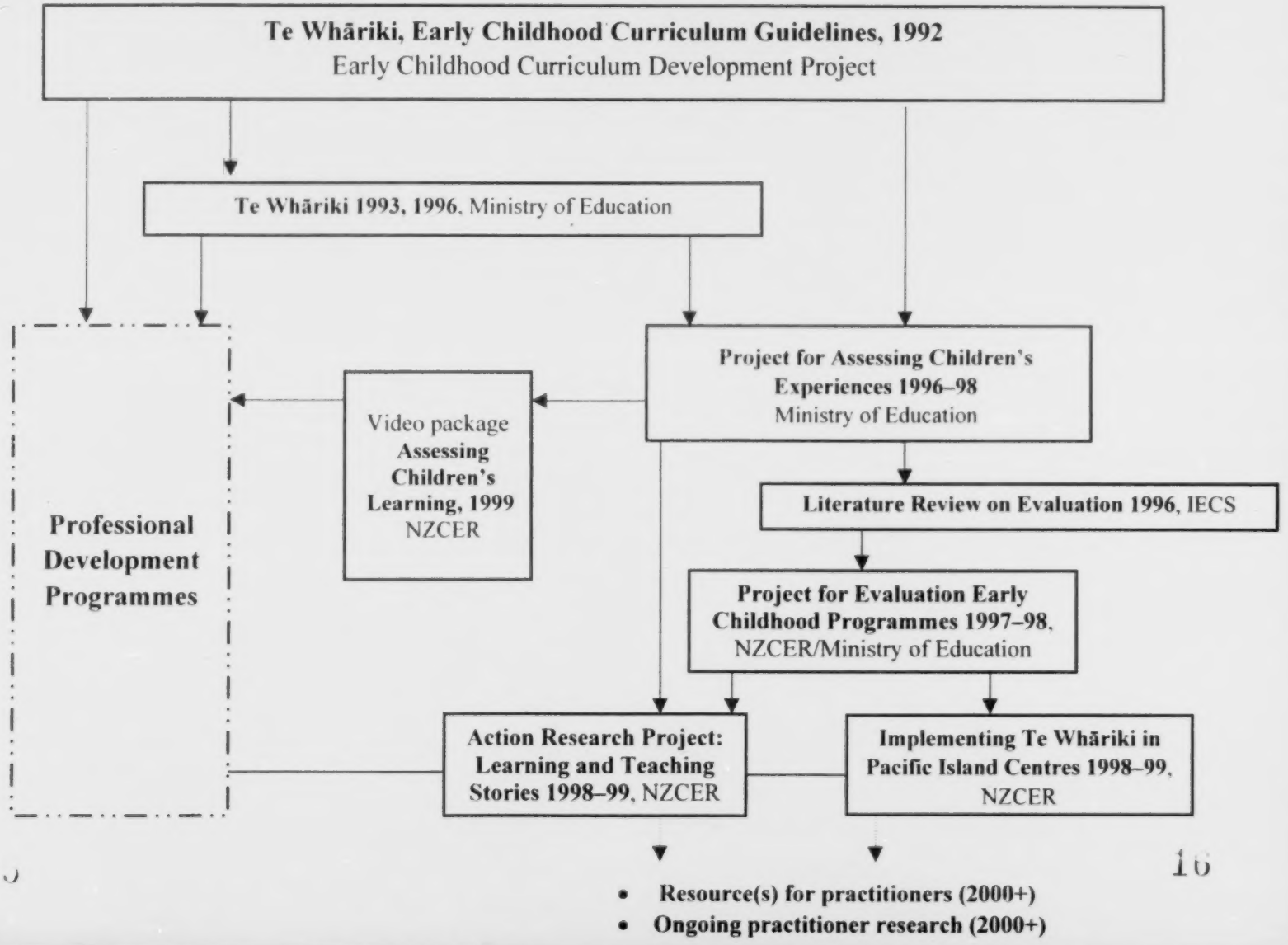
Political Context: National Curriculum

In New Zealand there is an acknowledgment by policy makers, in consultation with the early childhood sector, that implementing a national curriculum to make a difference for children is a long-term project (Carr & May, 1993b). It has been possible, through this project and its forerunners, for researchers to ask the questions, review the literature, consult the community, ponder the process, and trial some frameworks. Most important has been the opportunity for research grounded in the principles and approaches of New Zealand's own Te Whāriki, to be the guide for policy and practice in relation to assessment and evaluation.

Implementing a national curriculum to make a positive difference for children requires policy support across a number of areas, such as qualifications, training, funding, professional development, regulations and standards, and resources. The political realities of addressing all of these supporting aspects is complex, and achieving good policy outcomes has not always been entirely successful from some accounts (Meade, Podmore, May, Te One, & Brown, 1998; May, 1999). Nonetheless this research project has been a part of a number of policy and research initiatives from within, or supported by, the Ministry of Education in relation to the development of a national curriculum and providing incentives for the provision of quality standards in early childhood centres and services.

These initiatives are not, however, confined to early childhood services but are part of a broader culture of accountability in education institutions in New Zealand. The culture is also international. The researchers found that their considerations of the issues of curriculum, assessment, and evaluation from a research perspective generated interest in other countries also grappling with such issues (Nutbrown, 1996; Olssen, 1996; Bruce, 1996; Sobstad, 1997; Laevers, 1999). New Zealand was fortunate to have taken the time to consult widely with the early childhood community and to develop a national curriculum prior to formal requirements for assessment and evaluation and/or quality assurance systems (Carr & May, 1999).

DIAGRAM 1: HISTORY OF THE PROJECT: TE WHĀRIKI, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION


Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines, 1992
Early Childhood Curriculum Development Project
Te Whāriki 1993, 1996, Ministry of Education
Project for Assessing Children's Experiences 1996–98
Ministry of Education
Video package Assessing Children's Learning, 1999
NZCER
Professional Development Programmes
Literature Review on Evaluation 1996, IECS
Project for Evaluation Early Childhood Programmes 1997–98,
NZCER/Ministry of Education
Action Research Project: Learning and Teaching Stories 1998–99, NZCER
Implementing Te Whāriki in Pacific Island Centres 1998–99,
NZCER
• Resource(s) for practitioners (2000+)
• Ongoing practitioner research (2000+)

A key rationale for all phases of this project was to ensure that the initiatives in relation to programmes and quality and Te Whāriki are grounded in New Zealand-based research on quality, curriculum and programmes. It has been possible, although not always straightforward, to ensure that the Principles, Strands, and Goals of Te Whāriki guide all requirements for accountability (Carr, May, Meade, & Podmore, 1999).

Te Whāriki as a curriculum framework is unique to New Zealand, and practitioners have valued this (Murrow, 1995). Te Whāriki's philosophical and pedagogical approach to curriculum has received considerable international notice and affirmation, but it poses challenges to practitioners. It resists telling them what to teach and instead invites them to "weave" their own curriculum within the framework of Principles, Strands, and Goals according to the needs and interests of their own children and communities. This is "empowering" for children and requires professional judgment from practitioners. The researchers in this project, and its forerunners, have been concerned that the principle of empowerment for both children and practitioners be a key consideration for any possible frameworks for assessment and evaluation.

We have proposed a framework, this time of Learning and Teaching Stories, within which practitioners develop their own "action research tools" for self-evaluation of their particular programme. The considerable interest by teachers and practitioners in this project and its forerunners illustrates the concerns and desire for appropriate approaches to assessment and evaluation in this country.

The researchers have given many presentations and workshops which have, beyond the requirements of the research, assisted towards developing a framework that is not only theoretically robust (Meade et al., 1998; Ministry of Education, 1993; Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998), but understood by practitioners and deemed useful and insightful for reflection and further action. (*See* appendix C: *N.Z. Dissemination of Research 1998–99.*)

The most significant presentation of this research was a keynote invited symposium at the 7th Early Childhood Convention in Nelson in September 1999 with an audience of 950. This was most fitting as the 6th Early Childhood Convention Committee in Auckland provided some money for both the video package (Carr, 1998b) that was developed during the assessment project (Carr, 1998a) as well as seeding research for the earlier evaluation project (Cubey & Dalli, 1996).

During the period of this project the Ministry of Education has been undertaking a number of initiatives parallel to this work which are illustrative of the broader policy links of the project:

- The revised Desirable Objectives and Practices document (known as the revised DOPs) (Ministry of Education, 1996a) which sets out the required standards of provision in relation to funding, and its supporting document, *Quality in action/Te mahi whai hua: Implementing the revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices in New Zealand early childhood services,* which was launched by the Ministry of Education on 30 June 1998.
- Policy work within the Ministry of Education re-evaluating the regulatory framework in relation to the goals in early childhood education; developing quality indicators; and strengthening the relationship between qualifications and regulations.
- Ongoing professional development contracts which support the implementation of Te Whāriki.

During the project several policy decisions occurred in support of improving quality (Ministry of Education, 1999a):

- The Government announced its new policy for qualifications and the "person responsible" in July 1999. After a decade of delay the Diploma of Teaching was finally announced as the benchmark qualification, although the recommended requirements that people upgrade to this qualification were not successful (Meade et al., 1998). The level of qualification is an issue in any requirements for assessment and evaluation. Professional understanding of children and curriculum, in both theory and practice, is crucial for implementing a quality curriculum.
- The quality indicators project which moved from a focus on external evaluation to developing a resource for centres and services for self-evaluation. From the inception of this work the two research teams met to ensure that any quality review system and the proposed framework for assessment and evaluation was compatible and linked to both the Principles and Strands of Te Whāriki and the Principles and Divisions of DOPs. A joint document set out in appendix D: *Links Between Evaluation Projects,* illustrates these connections and provides an example of how Learning and Teaching Stories as a framework for assessment and evaluation can be an integral part of the process for the Ministry's new resource "Quality Journey" (Ministry of Education, 1999b).
- The relationship between the quality review processes and the Government's promised third tier of funding for centres, is unclear. Our research has shown that a key issue for any process of evaluation is that centre staff need time for discussion, reflection, and planning. This is important and it does cost money.
- The 1999 professional development contracts for the year 2000 are to be linked to work on Quality Journey. This will presumably involve working with the Ministry of Education's new resource for centres and services towards developing quality improvement systems. Our research will support this process.

Other related research funded by the Ministry of Education during this project was:

- the continuation of NZCER's Competent Children project, which shows clear connections between the experiences of children and the quality of centres (Wylie, Thompson, & Lythe, 1999); and,
- a study, parallel to and integrated with the present project, on the implementation of Te Whāriki in Pacific Islands early childhood centres (Mara, 1999, and Diagram 1). A follow-up proposal to develop and trial a framework for assessment and evaluation in Pacific Islands early childhood centres did not eventuate due to a lack of funding.

International Interest

There has been, as stated earlier, continuing international interest in Te Whāriki as a curriculum. Margaret Carr and Helen May have been invited to speak about Te Whāriki in a range of international fora since 1992 and have published and/or collected the "story" of its development and implementation in a wide range of journals, papers, and books (Carr & May, 1993a, 1994, 1996, 1997, in press). This interest has continued. The research team has again been fortunate to have the opportunity to present aspects of the assessment and evaluation project(s) in a number of international fora. In some cases we offered papers or symposia at conferences to "test the waters" with our approaches and

ideas, but we have also responded, where possible, to requests to present the research to date. (*See* appendix E: *International Dissemination of Research 1998–1999.*)

- In September 1995, during the early phase of the assessment project, Margaret Carr presented a paper on dispositions as an outcome for early childhood curriculum, at the 5th European Early Childhood Research Conference in Paris.
- In December 1997, Helen May was invited to Norway and Denmark for a series of conference presentations and seminars on New Zealand initiatives in early childhood curriculum and evaluation. Subsequently she presented workshops on curriculum and evaluation to several tours of Danish teachers who regularly come to New Zealand.
- Since 1997 the research team has had contact with the large quality evaluation project in England called Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project, co-ordinated by Professor Christine Pascal and Tony Bertram (Pascal, 1996, 1999; Pascal et al., 1995; Pascal & Bertram, 1998).
- At the Early Childhood Convention in Nelson in 1999 the research team talked with Professor Ferre Laevers, a keynote speaker from Leuven in Belgium, whose research on evaluation in relation to "well-being" and "involvement" (Laevers, 1999; Laevers, Vandenbussche, Kog, & Deponat, n.d.) has informed the EEL Project in Britain.
- When the three project directors presented a symposium at the 8th European Early Childhood Research Conference in Spain in September 1998, there were enthusiastic reactions to the particular approaches reported. The New Zealand publication of these papers has been very popular (Carr, May, & Podmore, 1998).
- Val Podmore has had a close collaboration with educational researchers in Europe after a presentation of the evaluation project at Ljubljiana, Slovenia, in September 1998. There has also been continuing contact with UNESCO, and links with the Ministry of Education in Vietnam, which were interested in this work.
- During the first half of 1999 both Margaret Carr and Helen May were on study leave in Europe. In March, Margaret Carr and researcher Pam Cubey were invited as keynote speakers to an international conference on assessment and evaluation hosted by Pen Green Early Childhood Centre of Excellence in the U.K.
- In April 1999 Margaret Carr presented a paper on aspects of the assessment project at the 3rd Warwick International Early Years Conference in the U.K.
- The release of the videos on "Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings" and its workshop package (Carr, 1998b) has generated further interest, and while in the U.K. Margaret responded to a number of requests for presentations of this work to early childhood practitioners, early childhood graduate students, primary school teachers, the early childhood academic community, and university researchers in education (at the Universities of London and Bristol).
- In June and July 1999 Helen May accepted invitations from the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Hague, Netherlands, and the Human Development Group of the World Bank, Washington, U.S., to speak on the broad issues of national curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and quality. Both of these agencies are particularly interested in the researchers' approaches to diversity because of the agencies' work in developing countries. A return invitation to speak at the April 2000 World Bank Conference, Investing in Our Children's Future, in Washington has been accepted.

- In November 1999 Margaret Carr and Val Podmore presented a paper on behalf of the project team at the AARE/NZARE conference in Melbourne.

All of these opportunities have been most valuable, as each occasion has provided a forum for critical debate. Like Te Whāriki, this distinctly New Zealand approach to assessment and evaluation is generating international notice as something brave and innovative.

The Pedagogical Context: "Learning and Teaching Stories"

"Learning Stories" and "Teaching Stories" are new terminology, although narrative or storied approaches in education and teacher education have an extensive literature (*see*, for example, Bruner, 1986, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Genishi, 1992; Middleton & May, 1997). Witherell and Noddings (1991) had this to say:

> Finally, stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. . . . They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and to what effect. (p. 280)

They provide us with data that enables practitioners, children, families, management, and outside agencies to identify the "engine" for progress and change: those aspects of the surround or the learning environment that appear to be key enabling or constraining factors. They enable assessment and evaluation to be *formative*.

In this project, Learning Stories refers to the framework developed for assessment during the Project for Assessing Children's Experiences (P.A.C.E.), (Carr, 1998c), and Teaching Stories refers to the systems, structures, and processes put in place by teachers/practitioners as part of on-going evaluation and accountability procedures. This is set out in Diagram 2: *A Learning and Teaching Story Framework*.

For instance, a Learning Story is a documented account of a child's learning event, structured around five key behaviours: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or a feeling, and taking responsibility (or taking another point of view). These Learning Stories accumulate over time, and are used by practitioners for individual planning: to move a child on to the next step in the story structure, to make any one step more complex, or to encourage positive learning stories to become a habit, a disposition, and an expectation. Each step in the story structure reflects well-defined skills and understandings, specific to the programme and to the context within the programme (the particular interest); the steps parallel the strands of the early childhood curriculum.

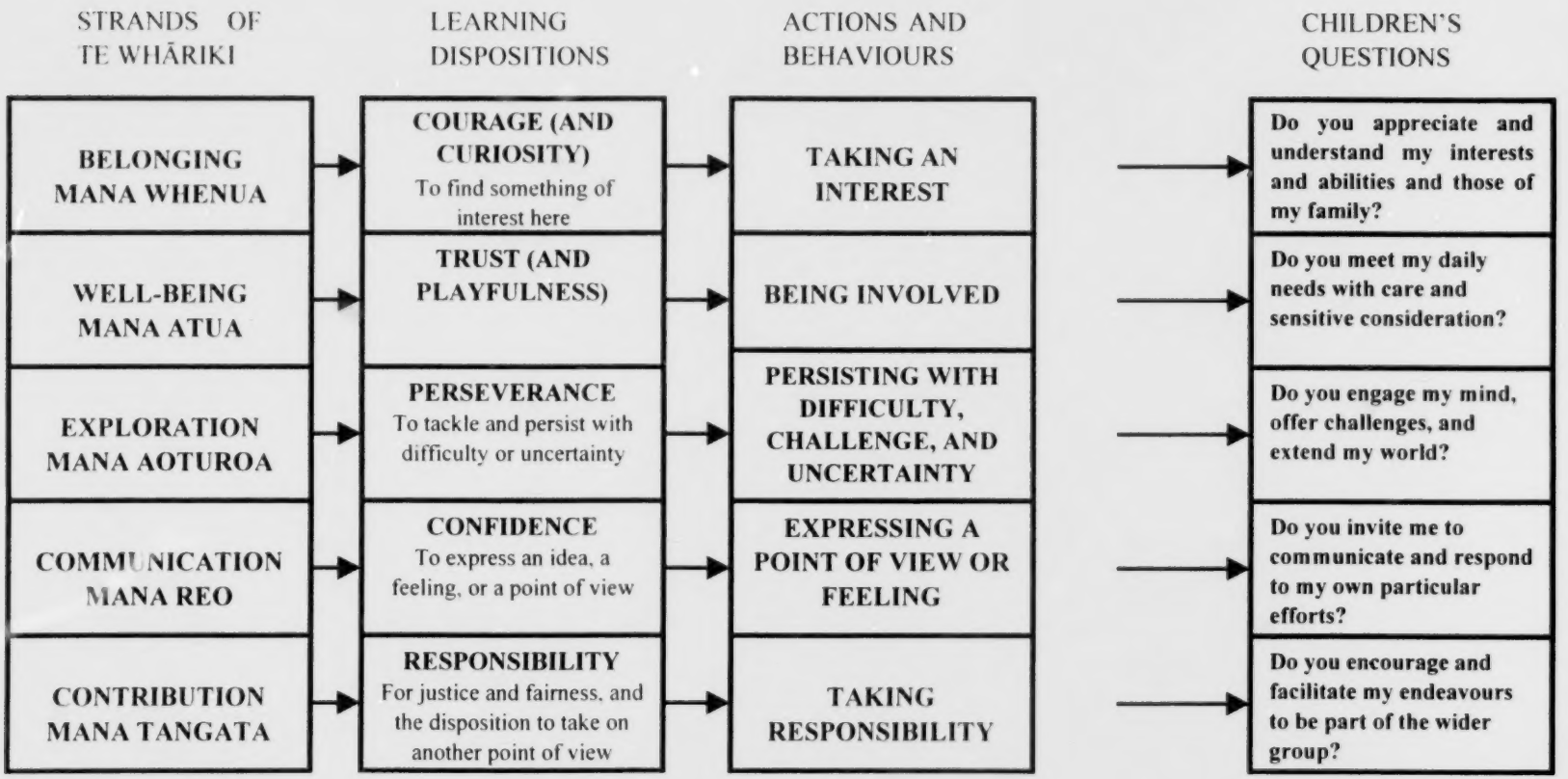
An example of a Learning Story, in the video package developed during P.A.C.E., was when four-year-old Jerome took the risk of joining a group of children at the flying fox (he usually worked on his own) and expressed his point of view to them. Teachers planning from this and other stories might encourage this to happen more often and, finally, for Jerome to teach some of the other children how to manage a queue and to have the courage to try the flying fox.

A Teaching Story, on the other hand, is about evaluating practice. It could emerge from an action research sequence in which staff decided that they did not know enough about what the families expected of the programme for their children.

An example of a Teaching Story might be a structured interview prepared for families, to be carried out in the appropriate language once a year. It might include an agreement with management to release staff to do this during the day. The two are connected—*see* Diagram 2. The Teaching Story framework of five children's questions emerged from the five behaviours in the Learning Story framework.

The earlier research (Carr, 1998a; Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998) demonstrated that Learning and Teaching Stories have been well received by practitioners and teachers. They also reflect well-researched theories about the way children learn, and the methodologies that best assess and evaluate this complex process (more detail on this argument may be found in Carr, 1998a).

Diagram 2: A Learning and Teaching Story Framework


STRANDS OF TE WHĀRIKI
LEARNING DISPOSITIONS
ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS
CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS
BELONGING MANA WHENUA
WELL-BEING MANA ATUA
EXPLORATION MANA AOTUROA
COMMUNICATION MANA REO
CONTRIBUTION MANA TANGATA
COURAGE (AND CURIOSITY) To find something of interest here
TRUST (AND PLAYFULNESS)
PERSEVERANCE To tackle and persist with difficulty or uncertainty
CONFIDENCE To express an idea, a feeling, or a point of view
RESPONSIBILITY For justice and fairness, and the disposition to take on another point of view
TAKING AN INTEREST
BEING INVOLVED
PERSISTING WITH DIFFICULTY, CHALLENGE, AND UNCERTAINTY
EXPRESSING A POINT OF VIEW OR FEELING
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY
Do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?
Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?
Do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world?
Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts?
Do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the wider group?

Project for Assessing Children's Experiences

Project for Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes using Te Whāriki

Understanding children's learning in an everyday and complex early childhood setting will always be an interpretive process, and validity will include coverage (constructs that are consistently applied across activities), convergence (data from different sources that converge), agreement (the viewpoints of several "audiences", including the children, agree), and leverage (the assessments and evaluations provide guidance for change) (Carr, 1999; Gee & Green, 1998).

In particular, a narrative reflects an emphasis on the context- and culturally-specific nature of learning (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Wertsch, 1991), an emphasis which highlights the role for children's understanding and skill development of their meaning-making and their relationships with people, places, and activities. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach provided a foundation sociocultural framework for Te Whāriki.

Theoretical Framework: The Child's Questions

Diagram 2: *A Learning and Teaching Story Framework* illustrates how the "child's voice" can provide the initial questions that centres need to ask of themselves as they begin their journey of evaluation. Five questions are asked from a child's perspective and are shown in both their simplified and elaborated forms. These questions:

- capture the essence of the case study teaching stories which were derived from ethnographic observational data and their subsequent analysis (in Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998);
- are designed to guide a centre's reflection on the effectiveness of their programme in relation to the strands of Te Whāriki;
- sit alongside their respective elements of the Learning Story framework (Carr, 1998a);
- identify the key tasks of an effective teacher who can provide responsive, respectful, reciprocal relationships in ensuring that the centre programme has positive outcomes for children;
- provide information about the quality of programmes by encapsulating the key research on quality; and
- provide the framework for the analysis of observations towards constructing a centre's own Teaching Story.

Podmore and May, with Mara (1998) described how the idea of focusing on the "child's voice" in defining and evaluating quality is consistent with current understanding of early childhood centre quality. Langsted (1994) and Jensen (1994) have documented how, in Denmark, children's perspectives have been included in definitions of high quality early childhood services. In New Zealand, the importance of focusing on children's perspectives is also highlighted by Anne Smith's work (Smith, 1995). Emerging research on children's perspectives of quality tends to include interviews with young children.

In contrast, the hypothetical "child's questions" developed from the data in the evaluation project are based on observations of infants, young children, adults, and contexts (Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998). That report demonstrated how the "child's questions" link evaluation to the key elements of programme quality in relation to the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki. The rationale underlying the specific questions asked was based on recent

research and theoretical work in early childhood education and human development. The draft version of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1993) makes preliminary reference to some relevant theoretical material. The next section of this report provides a summary outline of some links between each strand of Te Whāriki, the "child's question", and selected relevant research and theory.

An abbreviated version of each question is included. These shorter questions were developed by the research team for practitioners to use in this action research phase of the project.

Belonging

The "child's question" raised in relation to this strand is: *"Do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?"* This question is grounded in ecological approaches to human development which emphasise responsive learning contexts and reciprocal interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and a socialisation model which views children's learning within family and cultural contexts (McNaughton, 1995). It is also connected to emergent work on children's dispositions for learning (Carr, 1997; Katz, 1993).

The shortened form of the question, developed for this phase, is: *"Do you know me?"*

Well-being

The "child's question" here is: *"Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?"* Gerber (1984) emphasises the importance of respectful relationships with adults to the well-being of infants in early childhood centres (*see also* May, 1991). Observational research on adult-child interactions in childcare centres highlights the significant relationship between adults' appropriate caregiving, which includes their reciprocal, sensitive interactions, and children's development (e.g., Howes, Phillips, & Whitebrook, 1992; Smith, 1996a). Another aspect of sensitivity to young children's needs, described by Katz (1991), involves allowing them "social space" in early childhood centre settings. Research on temperament is also relevant to nurturing infants'/young children's well-being and responding to their emotional needs with care (Thomas, Chess, & Birch, 1970; Kohnstamm, 1988).

The shortened version of this question is: *"Can I trust you?"*

Exploration

"Do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world?" This question is connected to theoretical concepts of guided participation and scaffolding, based on Bruner's and Vygotsky's (1987) perspectives. Young children's need for challenging extensions of their thinking is evident in recent research on schemas (Meade, 1995). The "child's question" here is also consistent with the Pascal-Bertram framework for developing effectiveness in early learning settings, where the processes of adult engagement and child involvement are key components (Laevers et al., n.d.; Pascal, 1996). In view of Dweck's motivational research, extending the world of young children who are prone to set performance goals but

avoid difficulty is also important (e.g., Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Intellectual and physical challenges are both relevant.

This question is abbreviated to: *"Do you let me fly?"*

Communication

The "child's question" here is: *"Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts?"* The theoretical concepts of joint attention (Rogoff, 1990; Smith, 1996b), responsive communication (e.g., Howes, 1983, 1986; Howes, Phillips, & Whitebrook, 1992), and intersubjectivity (Rogoff, 1990, Bruner, 1995) underlie the importance of reciprocal communication, and shared understanding, between adults and young children. These are among the key elements of communication which characterise high quality interactive processes in early childhood centre settings.

The shorter version of this question is: *"Do you hear me?"*

Contribution

"Do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the wider group?" Affirmation of children through their interactions with adults, and encouragement to learn alongside others, are supported theoretically by work on joint attention (Rogoff, 1990); joint problem solving, and equal power (Smith, 1996b; *see also* Vygotsky, 1987).

The shorter question for contribution is: *"Is this place fair for us?"*

The researchers would not like to suggest that these are the only questions that could be posed from the strands of Te Whāriki. Centres may wish to pose their own or develop further questions particularly pertinent to their own centre context.

Research Questions

There were two original, overall research questions in relation to evaluation:

- What are the key elements of programme quality in relation to the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki, which should be the focus of evaluation practice?
- How can these features which characterise effective practice in early childhood centres be implemented into a framework for curriculum evaluation?

The first question was the focus of the earlier phases of the evaluation research (Podmore and May, with Mara, 1998). The second question is addressed by the present research.

Several further questions underlie this research.

- Is the Learning and Teaching Stories framework for assessment and evaluation sufficiently robust to work in centres that are of medium or poorer quality (with minimal professional development and experience in implementing Te Whāriki), and able to be used by adults without full teacher training (i.e., without a Diploma of Teaching—ECE)?

- Is the Learning and Teaching Stories framework for assessment and evaluation sufficiently flexible to be appropriate and meaningful in a broader range of kindergartens, playcentres, and childcare centres than those used in the development phases of both of the previous projects?
- In what ways can individual centres incorporate their own programme philosophies through the construction of their own Learning and Teaching Stories?
- What kinds of mechanisms need to be built into the framework to ensure a continuing process of observation, reflection, and change by teachers and management?
- What kind of mechanisms and resources are needed to facilitate the assessment and evaluation process for more widespread use by teachers that can be both efficient and meaningful?
- In what ways does the process effect changes to improve quality in relation to: children, adults, environment, and families, and support of management?

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Action Research Approach

This project draws on the action research framework of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), and on approaches used in related New Zealand studies (e.g., McPherson, 1994), to implement an action research spiral approach. An action research process was planned, across three regional sites, which invariably included spirals with observing, reflecting, planning, and acting. These action research spirals were derived from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

Spiral 1

- *Planning*
- *Acting and observing*
- *Reflection*

On management/practices; appraisal leading to action.

Spiral 2

- *Planning*
  To enhance quality with regard to Te Whāriki.
- *Acting and observing*
  Centres will carry out further observations focused on the changes implemented. Changes will be documented.
- *Reflection*
  Final reflection on and analysis of changes (to adults' reciprocal, responsive interactions, to the environment, and to management practices).

The rationale for using these methods was based in part on the evidence that action research is "considered to enhance professional learning and to foster reflective practice" in early childhood education (Rodd, 1994, p. 144). Improvement and involvement are the two central goals of action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In collaborative action research, it is considered that "improved practice results from practitioner participation in the investigation of actions and issues of immediate importance." (Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

Traditionally, action research has been portrayed as a strategy enabling practitioners to resolve difficulties they experience ". . . action research is a form of active learning: in essence, planned or studied enactment" (McKernan, 1991, p. 43). McKernan (1991), who contends that methodology is crucial to action research inquiry, has provided a framework specifying six categories of methods: observational methods, survey/self-report techniques, narratives, discourse analysis, pedagogical techniques, and critical evaluative methods (including triangulation and quadrangulation).

The action research implemented in the present study shows links to Atweh, Kemmis, and Weeks's (1998) perspectives on participatory action research. In addition to the spirals which include planning, acting and observing, reflecting, and re-planning, Atweh et al. propose that there are a further six features of action research. Participatory action research is a social

process, it is participatory, it is practical and collaborative, it is emancipatory (a process whereby "people explore the ways in which their practices are shaped and constrained by the wider social . . . structures"), it is critical, and it is recursive in that it aims to assist people to investigate and change reality (Atweh et al., 1998, pp. 23–24).

Planning for Action Research

At an initial joint meeting in May 1998, the project directors developed further the conceptual framework for the action research. Three preparatory tasks were to:

- confirm the framework developed in the evaluation project as the basis for the action research trial (Podmore & May with Mara, 1998). *See* appendix F: *A Framework for Assessment and Evaluation Using Learning and Teaching Stories*, and appendix G: *Action Research Trial of Learning and Teaching Stories*;
- simplify "the child's questions" developed in the evaluation project (*see* Diagram 2);
- develop evaluative tools for trialling during an action research process.

Diagram 2: *A Learning and Teaching Story Framework* illustrates how the "child's voice" can provide the initial questions that centres need to ask of themselves as they begin their journey of evaluation.

Action Research Tools

The approaches developed for this phase of the project were a selection of evaluation and assessment strategies described as action research tools. Examples of possible tools were presented and discussed at a first meeting of the advisory committee on 22 June 1998 (*see* appendices H and I). At that meeting, a set of principles was developed as a guideline for the construction of action research tools.

- The data collected are from different sources: parents/whanau, children, adults, peers.
- There are different kinds of data.
- The data are catalysts/triggers to raise "what if" questions. They are not for narrative evaluation purposes.
- The data will discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate.
- The data retain and highlight dilemmas and complexities.

These principles were developed further as "criteria of merit" from which practitioners and researchers could judge the value of the action research tools that they trialled. For each action research tool the practitioners and researchers discussed the following eight questions:

- is the data collection quick and easy?
- is it capable of starting an analysis and planning process (in a short timeframe)?
- is it capable of energising staff to reflect on their practice?
- is it capable of surprise, challenging assumptions?
- is it linked to the child's question in a transparent way?
- are the data that emerge precise?
- are the data capable of showing that action had made a difference?
- are the data capable of being analysed?

The Source of These Questions

In a sense these questions reflect standards or types of validity for formative and local action research self-evaluation tools. Many of these tools include observations, and the data are qualitative or interpretive in form. The tools are about the complex "interplay of individual experience and the engulfing cultural communicative society" (Nelson, 1996, p. 327). Any evaluation of that complexity will be an interpretive process.

We looked to three sources for our questions about utility or merit: the standards developed for formative assessment procedures in authentic curriculum-based approaches that have been developed by Stephen Bagnato for early intervention (Bagnato, 1997); the three elements of validity outlined in Gee and Green (1998) for discourse analysis and ethnographic perspectives; and the types of validity developed in Anderson and Herr (1999) for practitioner research.

Bagnato (1997) outlines the following standards for assessment approaches in early intervention programmes:

sensitivity (it provides a clear direction for curriculum development or intervention),
authenticity (it focuses on natural authentic settings and everyday contexts),
equity (it incorporates multiple ways of knowing and thinking and communicating, includes cultural and philosophical differences),
collaboration (it involves all interested participants),
convergence (it relies on more than one source of data), and
congruence (it reflects the construct of interest; also called construct validity).

Gee and Green (1998) list as elements of validity when the data is ethnographic:

coverage (a capacity for continuity and comparison; the criteria are consistently interpreted),
convergence (it relies on more than one source of data, or different analyses of the same data), and
agreement (different perspectives are included; there are opportunities for discussion).

Anderson and Herr (1999) add what is called "catalytic" validity, and we have added that too, as "**catalysing**". We have also added three more standards or types of validity for interpretive data:

challenge (the data are capable of challenging assumptions, not just affirming what we know already),
accessibility (the data are not difficult to collect), and
leverage (the data are capable of leading to action and change, and provide a way of showing that the action made a difference).

Three of these criteria, or standards of merit, refer to entire *evaluation programmes*: whether several sources of data (tools) are employed for each child's question of interest (**convergence**), whether all participants are involved (**collaboration**), and whether different perspectives are included (**equity** and **agreement**). The following questions were asked of the *individual action research tools*, and matched or were paired with the other criteria or standards of merit in the following way:

- **accessibility** (the data are not difficult to collect)
  Question: Is the data collection quick and easy?
- **authenticity** (it focuses on natural authentic settings and everyday contexts)
  Question: Is it capable of starting an analysis and planning process (in a short timeframe)?
- **catalysing** (it energises practitioners)
  Question: Is it capable of energising staff to reflect on their practice?
- **challenge** (it is capable of challenging assumptions, not just affirming what we know already)
  Question: Is it capable of surprise, challenging assumptions?
- **congruence** (it reflects the construct of interest; also called construct validity)
  Question: Is it linked to the child's question in a transparent way?
- **coverage** (a capacity for continuity and comparison; the criteria are consistently interpreted)
  Question: Are the data that emerge precise?
- **leverage** (the data are capable of leading to action and change, and provide a way of showing that the action made a difference)
  Question: Are the data capable of showing that action had made a difference?
- **sensitivity** (the data provide a clear direction for curriculum development or intervention)
  Question: Are the data capable of being analysed?

Sample

The action research used to trial this approach was sited in three geographic locations. In each region, the project operated alongside a Ministry of Education professional development contract. Early childhood centre participants worked with an action-research facilitator. The three geographical locations were:

Wellington
Auckland
Canterbury.

The sample includes two playcentres, two kindergartens, and two childcare centres. Two early childhood centres were included from each of the three geographical locations.

The early childhood centres were selected in consultation with professional development teams and the early childhood associations. Suggested criteria for centres to be selected were that they:

(a) had received little or no professional development concerned with implementing Te Whāriki in their centre;
(b) had fewer recently qualified practitioners and/or less experience in implementing, assessing, and evaluating in regard to Te Whāriki;

(c) were not too much under stress; and
(d) were eager to be involved in the research, given its one-year duration and the desirability of continuing commitment.

Geographical location and ethnic group composition of the centres were further considerations. The intention was to include at least one rural centre and to represent ethnic diversity if at all possible.

Ethics and Access Negotiations

The research was conducted in line with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's Statement of Ethics (1998). This safeguards the research participants' confidentiality, informed consent, and right to discontinue participation at any stage in the research. Consent was sought from the national and regional early childhood associations, and informed, written consent was obtained from the centre teachers, and from parents on behalf of themselves and their children. This was a continuing process as new children entered the centres and families joined the study as active participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

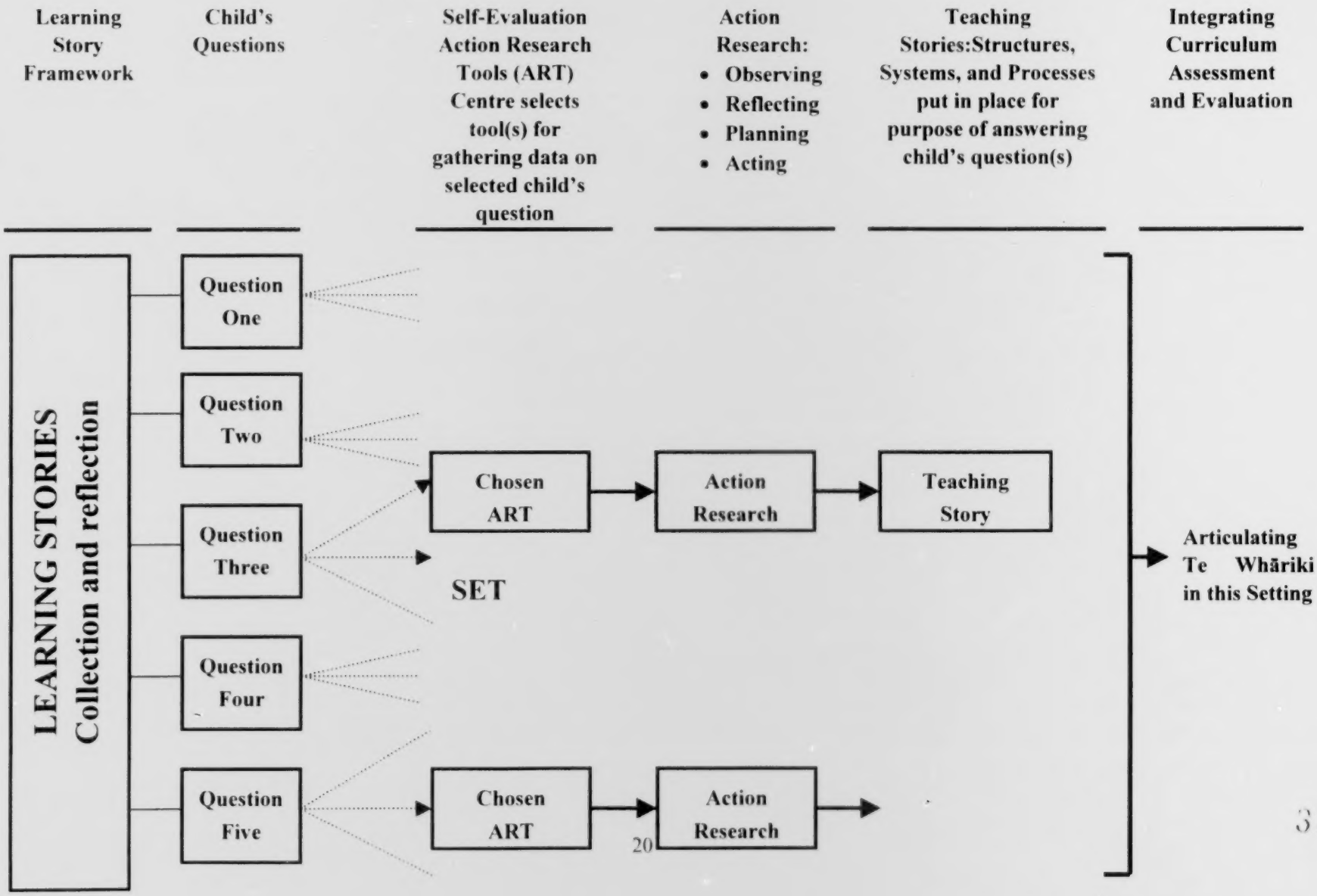
In each of the three regions, an action-research facilitator, supported by one of the research directors, co-ordinated the action research at two early childhood centres. Across the three regional sites, this process invariably included spirals with observing, reflecting, planning, and acting. Diagram 3 *From Learning Stories to Teaching Stories: A Process of Self-Evaluation* provides an example of the process.

It is important to note again that it is the participants from the early childhood centre who select and/or construct tools for gathering data on the selected child's question. The suggested list of action research tools provided for the researchers and practitioners and the participating centres were developed as examples that could be selected and trialled (appendix I). These action research tools were not intended to be prescriptive. There was scope for participants to construct new tools linked to the child's questions and the strands of Te Whāriki. The intention was to collect robust data.

Practitioners in the centres chose a child's question, then selected, adapted, or devised a self-evaluation action research tool for gathering data. Then they observed, reflected, planned, and acted (in varying order). Diagram 3: *From Learning Stories to Teaching Stories: A Process of Self-Evaluation* describes the process of action research, from Learning Stories to Teaching Stories. At the conclusion of the trialling of the action research tools, the research facilitators interviewed the participating practitioners in the centres. These interviews included some discussion of the eight questions that were developed to evaluate each research tool. Finally, it was intended that, in a cycle of evaluation, the centre practitioners would put in place structures, systems, and processes as appropriate to improve the implementation of Te Whāriki, and consequently enhance the experiences of children.

The next chapter describes the implementation of the action research process within the contexts of the six different early childhood centres. From the early planning stages through to finalising the writing of the summary case studies, the research process included reciprocal feedback and consultation with the centre participants.

DIAGRAM 3: From Learning Stories to Teaching Stories: A Process of Self-Evaluation



CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH IN SIX EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

A Summary of Contexts, Experiences, and Findings

At the conclusion of the action research in 1999, the research facilitator responsible developed a summary report and a full draft case study of the early childhood centre, in consultation with the centre participants and the project directors. Each centre is distinctive and different, and there were considerable variations in the processes deemed appropriate at each centre. Each of the summary reports outlines the context and philosophy of the centre, and reports on the strategies adopted and trialled during the action research process. The six centres are not identified by their actual names; they chose the following names for the purpose of this report:

- Ocean View Playcentre
- Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre
- Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten
- Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre
- Lakeside Kindergarten
- Justsence Playcentre

This chapter provides a brief summary outline of each case study from the six participating early childhood centres.

Ocean View Playcentre

Action Research Facilitator: Pam Cubey

The questions were thought provoking and reminded you as to what you should do. You found yourself on a learning curve. The questions provide you with a focus that has meaning rather than doing an observation that leaves you unsure as to what to do with it. (Playcentre parent)

Descriptive Observations about the Playcentre

The playcentre's new building, situated in a coastal suburb, opened at the beginning of 1998 after four years of considerable perseverance and hard work. It is light, airy, and well equipped with a covered deck and a well-used outdoor area. Play flows easily from indoors to outdoors.

Since the opening, the roll has climbed rapidly from 10 families (who had maintained their playcentre involvement in another playcentre while their centre was built) to 42 families with

60 children. The majority of children are from Pakeha families, are aged under 3 years, including infants and toddlers, and many are first-born children. Schools later attended by children from this playcentre have decile ratings of 8 (two schools), 7, and 4.

The playcentre sessions run from 9.15 a.m. to 11.45 a.m., from Monday to Friday. Different duty teams are responsible for each of the other sessions. Most of the parents are involved in some way in the team approach to supervision. There are very good adult/child ratios. There are two co-ordinators for each session and the teams range in size from eight to nine members.

At the beginning of the project, four parents had completed Playcentres' Part 2 training, 11 had Part 2, and two had Part 3 training. As Te Whāriki is addressed only in Part 2, the knowledge and familiarity of the majority of the parents with this curriculum was very slender.

Centre Philosophy

Here the philosophy is that of the Playcentre Association—

> valuing parents as teachers of young children; as capable of organising an important stage of education; as people competent to care for children and as people capable of sharing responsibility for providing the best experience for children's growth and enjoyment of life . . . provides opportunities and motivation for parents to benefit from learning experiences; to develop confidence and skills in working with a team of parents; to become more effective in providing care and education for children and to provide better conditions for children's play.

At this playcentre, the philosophy of free play is reflected in the programme. The atmosphere is happy and relaxed. Children are free to explore and experiment with a wide range of play experiences. The high adult/child ratios result in responsive and reciprocal relationships between adults and children.

Assessment and Evaluation Prior to the Project

Assessment and evaluation were largely informal. Evaluation was done "on the wing" and tended to be verbal rather than written, although using an evaluation form did enable the teams to make brief observational notes on the children and the play programme. This was not always done. Evaluation came at the conclusion of busy sessions and clearing up, with tired children, and often felt an added imposition. The evaluation forms were filed away and had little connection to programme planning. There was no system in place for passing on information about children's interests and strengths from one team to the next, although comments could be passed between teams informally and problems were often avoided in this way.

Programme planning was based on goals of Te Whāriki which were chosen by a small group of parents at a planning meeting at the beginning of each term, focusing on a different goal for each week. Each duty team put its own flavour on the plan. The majority of parents appeared to have little knowledge of Te Whāriki, had not been involved in developing the

term plan, and were uncertain as to what they should be doing in relation to the goals, so that usually there was little obvious reflection of the plan during the sessions.

Action Research and Professional Development Process

The Researcher's Role

The intention was for the researcher and the members to work collaboratively as researchers. However, the researcher frequently found herself taking on the role of adviser/facilitator.

Centre Dynamics and Initiatives

Project meetings, averaging two hours, took place in the evenings in the members' own time. Meetings were open to all parents and numbers fluctuated from three to eight. Only two members attended all meetings. Half way through the project there was an identifiable core group of six members, who showed a real interest and commitment. The group hoped that the centre participants would benefit from an increased understanding of Te Whāriki and be able to relate this effectively to assessment, planning, and evaluation.

The group members wanted all the families to be included as a way of helping them to become familiar with Te Whāriki and of developing a sense of belonging to the centre. Because of the large number of new families in the centre, the first research tool for Belonging—*Do You Know Me?*—was chosen as a non-threatening way to begin. Each parent was allocated a small number of children to observe and think about during the sessions and record what they saw as each child's interests and strengths. There were difficulties: the process had not been considered carefully enough; it was the first time that most parents had attempted to record an observation and they were understandably apprehensive and uncertain. Co-ordinators were torn between helping the parents and carrying out their own duties. Assessment of the tool led to a plan being devised to help parents and produce more effective observations. This was a slow process, which was further modified as more tools were tested.

The introduction of dispositions and learning stories in May provided a new impetus. Two more tools were tested and evaluated. Video recordings of the sessions enabled members of different teams to reflect jointly on the children's questions and tools.

By the end of the project parents were gaining confidence and were more involved in the observations. Teams were trying out different approaches to assessing children's learning and evaluating the sessions. Instead of this being left to co-ordinators, other team members were making a contribution. Some teams were including their observations in planning decisions for subsequent sessions. Planning was linked more clearly to Te Whāriki, although the core group is aware that it needs to go further yet. Members of the group want to continue with the project and test more tools.

Tools Trialled

Three tools were tested in relation to the Children's Questions: *Do You Know Me?* (Self-Evaluation Action Research Tool, ART 1.1), *Do You Let Me Fly?*, (ART 3.2), and *Is This Place Fair?* (ART 5.2).

When asked how useful the tools and child's voice questions had been in increasing their understanding and knowledge of the children and in influencing their work with them, the

core group responded that they were very useful, challenging, and illuminating. There was a difference in confidence in testing the tools between those parents who were used to observing and recording and parents unfamiliar with these skills. As the project progressed the latter became more comfortable with observation.

The tools proved useful for raising awareness about the programme in place at the playcentre; the children's interests, strengths, and needs; and Te Whāriki. Members of the group felt confident that this would lead them to developing their evaluation and planning cycle. The consensus was that the tools supported and reinforced the operation of the centre. Tool 5.2, in particular, "shone a spotlight on the children" and influenced practitioners' decisions about what they provided and how they might help the children. It validated the importance of the questions and the tools for evaluation.

Video recording was very valuable for this centre with its five different duty teams. It was a tool that could be used for group viewing and discussion when it was not possible to find time to assess and evaluate at the end of the sessions.

Issues about the Framework

The Learning and Teaching Story Framework presented a different way of thinking about children's learning and how to monitor and enhance it. "It has enabled us to talk about things related to the project and the centre as a whole. . . . If we hadn't been in the project we would not have done that."

It is regrettable that learning stories were not introduced at the beginning of the project. Instead, work began on the tools. Later, when the core group understood the relationship of the learning stories to the dispositions and strands, the framework became much clearer to them. Learning stories gave a focus to observations and increased enthusiasm within the group.

Time worked against keeping a conscious focus on the action research process. If it had been followed more closely the needs of the centre would have been dealt with more effectively even though it would have taken longer to address the tools.

The biggest challenge for the playcentre since it opened has been for a small group of founding parents to bring over 40 new families on board. There is much for new members to learn about playcentre, let alone understanding Te Whāriki and the assessment and evaluation framework. There may well be more important aspects of playcentre membership for them to absorb first.

It might have been better initially to have concentrated on professional support and development before launching into tool testing. This would have meant taking time to explore fully what stage the centre was at and what members saw as their needs, issues, and concerns. If the challenge of involving so many new families had been fully realised and reflected on at the beginning, the approach to planning for and testing the Learning and Teaching Story Framework may have been very different and much more effective.

A year has not been long enough for this centre to integrate observation, planning, assessment, and evaluation. Members of the core group are eager to make changes to their planning and use the tools to help them. They are on the verge of moving forward with some confidence. It has taken time to reach this point. The researcher feels it would be difficult for them to progress steadily without professional support.

"I wish it could have gone on for longer. It was only a drop in the ocean" (playcentre practitioner).

Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre

Action Research Facilitator: Pam Cubey

The project has changed the way we set our goals. We focus on the strand rather than the activity. In staff discussions we see patterns emerging, often for groups rather than the individual child, remembering that there are some children that have individual needs. The staff are in tune with them. We realise now that some goals can go on for weeks, especially with new children coming in and others developing and changing. (Childcare centre practitioner)

Descriptive Observations about the Centre

Cool Kiwis is a purpose built, co-operative childcare centre, managed by parents and staff. Situated in an old suburb, close to the city, it serves mainly middle class Pakeha/European families. Because the families are drawn from such a wide geographical area, children go on to attend an equally wide and diverse range of schools, none now in the local area. The centre is licensed for 25 children: six under two years and 19 two to five years of age. It is open from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., including school holidays. At the commencement of the project the roll stood at 19 and by the end it was above 30 with a maximum of 25 children attending each day. At the commencement of the project there were five teaching staff, two with BA degrees, three with Diplomas in ECE, and one in training for an ECE degree. Also employed are two part-time domestic workers and a cleaner. During the project two staff moved overseas, one being replaced by a long-term reliever.

There is a reasonable outdoor area for a centre so close to the city. The interior of the building presents difficulties for programme planning. Children are treated as individuals, are able to choose from a variety of activities for most of the time, and are encouraged to care for and appreciate each other. They appear to be at home and well settled. Staff develop the programme with children's interests and abilities in mind and help children understand the limits in a positive way. Parents are greeted warmly. Staff take time to talk with them at arrival and departure times and keep them well informed about their children. A feature of the centre is how the staff try to link it with the community and what is happening around the city.

Centre Philosophy

The statement of the centre's philosophy includes the following:

> . . . to provide a loving, caring, learning environment. We believe in accepting and supporting different values, beliefs, cultures, religions and lifestyles and an holistic approach to working with children, providing an environment which encourages self choice and expression and intellectual

development, meeting the needs of each child, encouraging their potential, the importance of staff, parents and whanau working together for the wellbeing of the children and support for each other and for the children to enjoy life fully, like themselves, have self esteem and confidence, be accepting of others, have social skills and relate well to others, be caring, considerate and compassionate, enjoy and experience learning through a wide choice of mediums, use their bodies skillfully, express themselves through speech, movement and art, feel safe and secure, develop realistic expectations of themselves, and recognise that life has clear limits but need not be restrictive or stifling.

System of Assessment, Evaluation, and Planning Prior to the Project

Each staff member was a primary caregiver for a group of children, documenting their development and learning in daily notebooks and profile books. Staff made regular observations, mainly anecdotal and running records, and shared these with parents informally each day. The profile books were used as a basis for parent interviews and aimed to build up a comprehensive picture of the children's time at the centre. Observational records were linked to Te Whāriki. Towards the end of the project, the assistant supervisor said that although the staff believed in Te Whāriki prior to the project they did not have a good understanding of it. Planning was done weekly, arising from observations and the children's interests and needs, and attempting to link the planned experiences to the goals of Te Whāriki. Assessment and evaluation tended to be carried out verbally and informally. Teachers were finding that the relationship between planning and Te Whāriki was complicated: they were searching for a simpler, more workable approach.

Research Project

The Researcher's Role

The researcher saw her role as researcher/facilitator was to work in partnership with the staff in an action research process. There were several occasions when she found it necessary to change to the roles of supporter, facilitator, or adviser.

Centre Dynamics and Initiatives

Staff members were keen to participate in the study and to test the tools. They had been exploring different ways to initiate a more effective approach to programme planning and felt the project might help "to find guidelines for our programme planning and Te Whāriki and for both to be simplified". In all, nine tools and three strands were tested. From the testing of the first tool, there was an air of excitement among the group. Comments were: "There was time to think about the children"; "It pointed up challenges"; "It gave me insight into things going on for them". This enthusiasm was maintained throughout the project despite times when settling in new children, and coping with relievers and staff sickness, meant they could not proceed as quickly as they wished.

The deputy supervisor, in consultation with the staff, developed an effective way to document the answers to the child's voice questions. This resulted in much more information, which staff found easy to analyse and use, being gathered about the children. It also enabled them to provide comprehensive profiles for the parents.

Staff were very positive about their involvement in the project. They felt it had resulted in their all knowing all the children better. They also found that the tools had provided very useful insights into their own performance. They identified important implications for the environment and the programme. Their collaboration when planning, which was good before, became even better. Their knowledge and understanding of Te Whāriki deepened and is now reflected in their thinking, discussions, practices, and planning. Their goals, which are child centred rather than adult oriented, have become wider, and staff accept that it can take a long time to achieve many of them. These teachers have been interested in testing as many tools as possible. They have not tried the peer observations, not through any reluctance but because of insufficient time.

Tools Trialled

Belonging: *Do You Know Me?* Action Research Tool (ART) 1.1 (*re* children's interests) and 1.2 (staff survey *re* children's interests). Both these tools were very useful. The shared knowledge of the team has resulted in a deeper understanding of the children.

Well-being: *Can I Trust You?* ART 2.1 (observation of a selected group of children, time sampling, using a five-point scale of involvement) would be more useful as duration recording rather than time sampling.

ART 2.2 (time sampling with a group of children, every hour, using a Mood Scale on a 1-5 continuum from happy/positive to sad/distressed/negative) was open to subjective responses and not so useful in this centre. (The scales of 1–5 in both 2.1 and 2.2 were open to too many different interpretations. Everyone had their own view of what each point of the scale meant.)

ART 2.3 (staff record of what they know about each child's signals of distress/happineess). The information gained could be useful to pass on to new staff members, but children, especially infants and toddlers, can change so rapidly that this tool would need to be updated regularly. As long as the dates of the data collection were recorded, interesting information about progress could be noted.

ART 2.4 (1) and (2) (adult collection of two episodes of their own responses to children, one successful, one that "missed the boat"). "Both were great!" (1) provided positive reinforcement for staff and along with (2) was good for staff relationships, honest sharing, and self-reflection.

Exploration: *Do You Let Me Fly?* Tool 3.1 (observations *re* challenges for children) was very useful.

ART 3.2 (observations *re* challenges in an area of play) was open to different interpretations. It was hard to know if children were avoiding difficulty or challenge. Before testing, more time should be spent in clearly defining what is meant by avoidance, persistence, and uncertainty. This tool had been useful in pointing out that the older children needed more challenges.

Staff commented that although it took a little time to get started on new tools they quickly discovered how useful they were. They provided a focus to work with and increased staff awareness of children's interests, strengths, and needs as well as the importance of adults' responsive and reciprocal relationships with the children. "We knew what we were looking

for and it was so much easier." "They provided us with either reinforcement or surprises. Working with the tools promoted discussion and how important each goal and strand is."

Issues about the Framework

Learning Dispositions and Learning Stories could perhaps have been the first step of the project. Not commencing with a careful consideration of children's learning dispositions and trialling the learning story observations was regretted by the centre participants. Once Learning Dispositions and Learning Stories were introduced, the framework was more fully appreciated and the learning story observations helped the staff to think more deeply about the child's voice questions.

Individual interviews are evidence of how much the practitioners' involvement in the project has influenced their thinking, professional development, and understanding of Te Whāriki as well as empowering them as teachers of young children. Their practices and planning have undergone some changes, but practitioners and the researcher all feel that there was insufficient time to move as far as they would have liked. One year was not long enough to explore the project fully. Bringing about change is a slow process and, for many centres, two to three years would be a more realistic timeframe for this to be achieved effectively.

Constraints presented by the physical environment and difficulties with management, length of time between project meetings, and other demands on the practitioners' energies have worked against achieving as much as was hoped with the project. This reality of "how it is" is shared by other centres, consumes practitioners' energies, and can get in the way of improving their work with children. By using the action research model and the professional development approach where a needs analysis of the centre is the first step, such problems can be identified and a starting point determined. It may be that problems unrelated to assessment and evaluation need to be addressed first.

The positive attitude of the practitioners to a new challenge has been a key factor in their working so well, despite constraints. They were a strong team who respected one another. Testing the tools, reflecting, and discussing them at the project meeting and in their daily exchanges resulted in even greater openness, respect, and enjoyment in working together and learning from each other. Having fun in what they were discovering became something that was valued. Project meetings provided a forum for staff to share their findings, discussing the children in a focused way and working together to achieve their goals. It made a change in the way they worked with children. This was a valuable experience and an opportunity which many centres do not have.

As the project proceeded the tools raised the practitioners' awareness of the importance of responsive, reciprocal, and respectful relationships. This caused them to examine their own roles and to have a different slant on their planning. They were not focusing so much on activities, but thinking more about what they needed to do for children in relation to the child's voice questions. This suggests that the tools can be influential in shifting practitioners' beliefs and attitudes.

Without the presence of a facilitator and reasonably regular meetings over more than a year it would be very difficult for teams of teachers to be able to integrate the learning and teaching framework into their practice.

Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten

Action Research Facilitator: Ann Hatherly

With planning and observation in the past we've looked at activities and what children are doing, not necessarily social things and the fact that they (the children) might be helping each other. We are still planning for activities but we are planning these other things too. To put it simply, we are looking at children more holistically. (Elizabeth, Head Teacher)

Descriptive Observations about the Centre and its Community

Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten is a three-teacher kindergarten licensed to take children from the age of two years. It is situated on the grounds of a primary school in a multicultural suburb of a large New Zealand city. The kindergarten serves mainly low-income families. The four neighbouring schools each have a decile rating of 1. Most of the children attending the centre are of either Maori or Pacific Islands descent, but there are also a number from the Indian subcontinent and Asia. The staff members also represent diverse cultures—New Zealand-European, Samoan-Tokelauan, and Cook Island. Two staff members hold the early childhood Diploma of Teaching, while the third is currently studying towards this.

The kindergarten operates from a purpose-built, open-plan building constructed in the late 1970s. It has a flat and reasonably spacious outdoor area overlooking the neighbouring school grounds. Artefacts and notices written in a variety of languages enhance the multi-ethnic atmosphere. Comfortable chairs and a large sofa fill one corner and are frequently used by the many parents who stay during the sessions, often with their babies or toddlers. There are 45 children on the morning roll and 41 on the afternoon roll. Children generally start attending once they turn three years. The kindergarten operates on the traditional pattern of five mornings and three afternoons per week. Wednesday and Friday afternoons are the non-contact sessions. Attendance is particularly low at the afternoon sessions, and the staff feel the pressure of meeting the attendance requirements for funding. The kindergarten is part of the "Books in Homes" scheme, a programme designed to get children's books into homes that would otherwise not have them and to encourage parents to read to their children.

Philosophy of the Centre

The centre's philosophy document states that the staff aim to provide "an atmosphere that is warm, accepting and welcoming to both children and adults". It also asserts a commitment to "a developmentally appropriate, child-initiated programme, using Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum which enables children to learn through interaction with both adults and children". There is an emphasis on children learning democratic processes and respect for both people and the environment.

Staff members see their main role with the children as providing a range of activities—a stimulating physical environment. They believe that through this children will have opportunities to explore things that are interesting to them and therefore will be motivated to

learn. They are concerned to ensure that children are not constrained by adult direction and interference in their play. It is a philosophy of teaching which is largely derived from Piagetian theory of how children learn. Providing a supportive meeting place for families is seen by the staff as a non-negotiable function of the kindergarten, one which is fitting for the particular community that it serves. Parents can always be found at the centre, even during the non-contact sessions. The nature of the community means that staff members often find themselves playing a major role in fundraising and other activities which, in communities with more financial and organisational resources, would normally be carried out by parents. While this undoubtedly puts extra demands and pressure on staff, they believe it is important and necessary to running a successful centre.

Assessment and Evaluation Prior to the Project

At the beginning of each term, the staff use a non-contact session to plan for that term. The goals of Te Whāriki were kept in mind and provided a general framework for planning. Planning focused on the environment, in particular on deciding what activities and experiences staff would present for the children. Because staff felt that many of the children had few experiences outside the immediate community, they had a policy of organising a major excursion each term. They loosely wrapped a "theme" around this event, which then became the basis of the programme for the first half of the term. In the second half of the term, the staff drew on their generalised observations of the children to select an interest, strength, or need and so arrived at the framework for their planning.

The staff employed a combination of recording techniques to assess children's progress. "Post-its", together with a checklist based on the Learning Outcomes of Te Whāriki, were used for anecdotal recording. A file was kept for each child. Over the time of the child's attendance at the kindergarten, observational records, examples of work, and photographs were placed in this file. The files appeared to serve summative rather than formative purposes, since the staff indicated that the information they each collected was rarely discussed as a group. Files were given to the family when their child left the kindergarten for school. Each staff member had prime responsibility for collecting documentation on approximately 15 children. To try to make the assessment process manageable, the staff concentrated on assessing three morning and three afternoon children over a two-week period. On their own admission, staff had found it difficult to consistently keep up with the assessments. In the head teacher Elizabeth's words:

> I'm going to be really frank here. We don't always keep up with our observations. We might do well for a couple of weeks and then for three weeks we don't get any done at all.

Action Research/Professional Development Process over the Project

During the project, the researcher met with the staff on 11 occasions. In accepting the invitation to participate, the staff saw an opportunity to engage an outsider's help and so bring in new ideas and approaches to planning. The initial months of involvement revealed that the staff members were expecting something more prescriptive in the way of direction and ideas than was intended by the project team. As Elizabeth put it:

> I'm not of the generation where you have to find the answers. I'm used to waiting for someone to tell me what to do. This is challenging not only for the children but also for us!

Expectations of professional development, coupled with the complexity of new ideas accompanying the notion of learning dispositions, the researcher not knowing the staff before the contract, variation in staff confidence, and other pressures staff had to contend with (for example, implementation of the DOPs), meant that it was six months before staff began to experience and report any significant benefits of being involved in the project. Fortunately, the head teacher and the researcher were able to keep communication open on these issues so that the work did not founder.

By the end of the project staff indicated that they were sharing more information about children.

> It's made us talk a lot more and discuss a lot more between ourselves instead of keeping ideas to ourselves. (Tracy-Marie)

However, there was also some doubt in their minds that they would continue to use the framework without "the discipline" of regular meetings with an outsider. In the head teacher's words:

> Once the pressure is off then it is easy to leave it because there is a lot of other stuff happening. (Elizabeth)

Tools Trialled

During the course of the project, the staff developed self-evaluation action research tools derived from two child's questions—*"Do you let me fly?"* and *"Do you know me?"*. Within *"Do you let me fly?"* a total of five observational tools were tested. The first three focused on a context, the water trough, where staff members were concerned that they were not challenging the children adequately. The tools here included anecdotal recordings of participation, time sampling observations, and video recording. Particular attention was given to observing behaviours indicating persistence or avoidance.

The final two tools looked for the same disposition—first across the whole curriculum and then focusing on social relationships and communication—using more detailed observational grids. In the last three months of the project staff developed two very brief questionnaires, with three questions asking families about their interests and hobbies, their expectations of the kindergarten, and ways that they might contribute at the centre.

Staff found the questionnaires to be considerably more useful than the observational tools. The former related to a pre-existing interest in serving the community well. Staff found that through the responses to the questionnaires some of their preconceptions about the lack of richness in these families' lives were challenged; for example, there was more reading going on in homes than they thought. By contrast, the observational tools dealing with children's persistence and challenge only moderately inspired the staff due to time constraints on observations and their existing views on the value of recorded observations.

The work in this centre suggests the following points in relation to the tools:

- An evaluative tool, such as a questionnaire, can be short and simple yet still very effective (parent questionnaire).
- A well-designed tool can succeed in the face of apparent difficulties (parents for whom English is an additional language).

Issues about the Framework

For teachers accustomed to focusing on the provision of activities and resources in their evaluation and planning, the framework of child's questions represented a very different way of working. This points to the need for the availability of comprehensive professional development on such notions as learning dispositions, and even learning theories, before some centres begin to develop evaluative tools. While it is one thing to find tools to collect data successfully, it is quite another to be able to put the data to good use. The framework cannot be regarded as an automatic panacea for improvement. If staff members are not accustomed to collecting information for formative purposes, then they will need further outside support to validate this part of the action research process.

The message portrayed by this case study is that tools which connect with what is valued by staff within a particular service (in this case serving as a centre for families) will have a greater chance of success. In other words, ownership in the choice and design of tools is important. In hindsight, and with greater understanding of how the staff worked and what they valued, starting with the parents' questionnaires would have been more beneficial to building confidence in using action research. This notion of ownership also has implications for teacher training and suggests the importance of approaches which emphasise critical reflection rather than "off the shelf" solutions.

Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre

Action Research Facilitator: Ann Hatherly

What had we been doing at staff meetings for the past 5 years?—complaining about things like leaving the loo roll empty. Who cares! Our meetings have (now) become so child focused (staff member)

Descriptive Observations about the Centre and its Community

Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre is a privately owned centre located in a well-established central city suburb. It operates from a large leased building, which is not purpose built and has many rooms leading off a central corridor. The outdoor area is relatively small. There are 12 equivalent full-time places for children aged under two years (the centre takes children from three months of age), and 20 places for children aged over two years. Although the centre is licensed for 23 and 24 respectively, the owner does not believe that it can provide good quality care and education with such high numbers. The children are predominantly of European New Zealand descent. The centre serves many parents who are in professional occupations, and who do not necessarily live in the immediate community.

Staff qualifications range from untrained to three staff who hold either a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) or four-year Bachelor of Education degree. The owner and the supervisor are currently enrolled in Master of Education degrees. A core group of six staff were involved with the project, most of whom have worked at the centre for two or more years. These staff members get on well together. Humour and warmth characterise their working relationship.

Philosophy of the Centre

The centre's philosophy is grounded in the Principles of Te Whāriki—the two senior staff had had a strong foundation in the curriculum through their initial teacher training. As this excerpt from their philosophy statement suggests, facilitating children's learning and well-being are equally valued:

> The staff and management aim to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the care and education of young children. We believe children learn through active participation in self-directed play with real-life experiences. We structure our environment to encourage maximum interest in learning.

Staff believe in all the children having as much choice as possible about the activities in which they engage. However, the constraints on supervision of the physical environment mean that some curriculum areas are necessarily restricted to certain times of the day. Under-twos and over-twos have their own separate areas but come together at certain times of the day. Staff feel that this gives children the best of both worlds—a chance to play at their level and pace yet the opportunity to interact, consider, and learn from older or younger children. A partnership with parents is highly valued. Although this is a privately owned centre, there is a "parent group" which is called upon for advice when policy is being formulated.

Assessment and Evaluation Prior to the Project

Although there were systems in operation both for the assessment of children and for planning, on the owner's admission, in practice these two aspects were not connected well. Individual children's interests and strengths were noted, mainly from running records of their behaviour, and then put into a portfolio (known as an individual development profile). While the intent of the assessment was formative, in reality it remained essentially a summative exercise. (The staff had little time to look at or discuss the information contained in the portfolios.) Planning, on the other hand, was largely issue driven. The focus of the programme frequently arose from a concern, such as some children not settling easily. Key activities available for the children were set out in advance in a weekly planning grid and displayed for parents. However, the staff felt that parents rarely studied these. At the time of joining this project, the owner was looking for ways to put the assessments to better use and make planning a more collaborative effort amongst staff.

Action Research/Professional Development Process over the Project

During the project, staff met with the researcher on nine occasions. In between these meetings contact was maintained by e-mail with the owner and through occasional newsletters sent to all staff. The supervisor was appointed the official liaison person for the project. It was her responsibility to draw up recording sheets and to collate the data. She often met with the researcher in between staff meetings to discuss the next phase of the project. This working partnership with an "insider" proved very valuable for the researcher. The researcher's role changed as the project progressed. In the beginning staff needed direction and reassurance about action research and how to use the framework of the child's questions. As they became more familiar with the cycle of trialling tools, reviewing the data and planning, the researcher's role moved more to "devil's advocate". At times she also facilitated workshops, for example on learning dispositions, or sourced reading material for staff. Staff attributed much of their progress to having an outside facilitator. Some commented that the facilitator helped to challenge the tendency of staff to want to justify findings that were unfavourable.

While the centre leaders were excited by the project from the outset, other staff were fearful of research and took some convincing to feel comfortable about participating. As the project progressed, these fears diminished and confidence in contributing grew quite noticeably. As one staff member said in a final interview:

> It's changed my idea of research because research was quite intimidating to me. When we did this it is more 'hands on' practical rather than theory. My idea of research was theory. (Ginger)

All staff members are in no doubt that involvement in the project was enormously beneficial, both for individuals and for the centre as a whole. The impact of the project on professional development, and on the centre's practices, is perhaps best summed up by the owner, Isobel:

> The whole research has affected the whole centre. We have become closer to our parents, we know our children better, the whole staff are far more focused, we have reviewed policy, we have looked at practice.

One staff member working with the under-twos described it as her "wake up call" professionally.

> If I am involved with a group of children those questions flash in my mind. You know—do you let me fly—am I doing that? (Moana)

Staff described how their assessment focus had moved from one which concentrated on children's behaviours that were to be changed (deficit model), to one based on children's interests (credit model). They also talked of the contribution the project had made to team building, in particular the tool that involved peer assessment.

> It is fine to have a piece of paper and to do a peer appraisal but this was from the heart you know. It was very good team building. (Isobel, the owner)

Tools Trialled

For most of the research period, staff concentrated on one child's question, *"Do you hear me?"* In the final two months however, staff working with the children aged over two years began to trial tools associated with *"Do you let me fly?"* Within the communication strand of Te Whāriki, staff began with a focus on sustained conversations. Conversations were defined as interactions where information was shared over several turns (adult and child) and where the adult felt a sense of engagement. Staff trialled both qualitative tools (recorded summaries of conversations in notebooks) and quantitative tools (for example, charts detailing numbers of conversations, who initiated these) and found to their surprise that the latter were more helpful and manageable. Following this, staff turned their attention on their own conversational strategies.

They devised a tool they dubbed "secret spies" which saw each staff member allocated another staff member to observe secretly over a two-week period. For most staff this was the most successful and powerful tool in terms of their professional development. The information was both affirming and helpful, as it highlighted individual strengths and made staff more aware of conversational strategies. After "secret spies" some staff observed changes in the quality of staff/child interactions: "I have noticed other teachers are speaking more to the children and getting down to their level".

As a consequence of their concern that the tools developed were not so suitable for under-twos, staff designed a tool especially for this age group to evaluate *"Do you hear me?"* It consisted of a number of hypothetical sub-questions, also from a child's perspective, for example, "Will you watch me and share my triumphs?" and "Will you come down here so I can sit on your knee and feel safe?" Staff used the questions as a self-evaluative tool but conceded that it would be more effective to use a "critical friend" as an evaluator. Near the end of the project, staff working with the children aged over two years turned their attention to the amount of challenge the four-year-olds were receiving (addressing the question, *"Do you let me fly?"*). They used a time-sampling approach to record the participation of individual children in two curriculum areas. While this was helpful in highlighting certain physical constraints to access, they felt the tool told them little about the level of challenge they provided for these children.

The work in this centre suggests the following points in relation to the tools:

- effective tools can be both qualitative and quantitative;
- the greater the risks staff are prepared to take, the more powerful and useful the tool (secret spies);
- although the questions address a child's perspective, they put attention on the quality of the adult's role (if staff choose to use them in this way);
- there is value in focusing on one question in depth and over time (for example, *"Do you hear me?"*). The information gleaned goes towards answering other questions from the framework as well (in this case, *"Do you know me?"*); and
- evaluative tools can be both effective and manageable—staff found that recording did not have to take them away from their work with children.

Issues about the Framework

The framework of the child's questions provides direction, yet allows flexibility to take account of context. While being able to design tools enables all staff to have ownership of the change process, it also presumes that there are at least some staff in the centre with a strong commitment to self-inquiry and professional development. From the researcher's point of view, a key factor in the success of this case study was the professional partnership she had with the two senior staff, both of whom modelled the ability to reflect and critique centre practice. The influence of their educational leadership kept the evaluation process alive between meetings. It is also important to acknowledge that it is only when the information collected is shared and discussed that the tools become useful. This presupposes that staff members have opportunities to meet regularly for the time it takes to evaluate (in this case meetings lasted at least two hours). Staff indicated that the project's success also depended on maintaining the same core group of staff and on having an outside facilitator to give initial direction and keep meetings focused.

Although the child's questions may appear relatively straightforward, the framework does require a depth of theoretical understanding and knowledge of concepts like learning dispositions. In this centre a workshop was run on dispositions, but in hindsight this was not enough. Future professional development initiatives need to take account of the fact that using dispositional frameworks as a basis of assessment is likely to be new to most staff, even those who, like these staff, have gained their professional qualifications recently.

Justsence Playcentre

Action Research Facilitator: Bernadette Macartney

*It's not a paperwork centre, it's a **playcentre**!* (Parent at Justsence Playcentre)

Descriptive Observations about the Centre

The Justsence Playcentre is situated in a small rural township on the outskirts of a city, with 10 to 16 families attending over the course of the project. The centre operates three two-and-a-half-hour morning sessions a week during term time. Children over two-and-a-half years of age can be enrolled and attend without their parents. During the project the playcentre began enrolling under two-and-a-half-year-olds who could attend with their parents. All parents were welcome to stay at the playcentre with their child/ren. The centre was made up of a mix of farming families and other parents working in professions and commuting into the city for paid work. The majority of families were Pakeha New Zealanders. During the project there were four children attending the centre who were non-Pakeha. Most of the children from this playcentre leave to attend the local school which has a decile rating of 10.

The playcentre is housed in a large room situated to the rear of the local community hall with direct access to an outdoor play area equipped with a sandpit, swings, climbing structure, and shed where other usual outdoor activities and resources are stored. The toilets and nappy changing area are a long way from the indoor space of the centre. A minimum of

two parents and a paid supervisor are responsible for running each session. Parents are expected to become involved in the centre's parent education programme. This is organised by the playcentre and delivered by the supervisor, some of the parents, and the regional Playcentre Association. Towards the end of the project, four parents began working towards Part Two of their Playcentre Certificates. Playcentre participants describe their group as being very cohesive and attribute this to being part of a small community.

Philosophy of the Centre

The supervisor and parents view parent involvement as a strength of their centre. They believe in the value of families meeting other families and learning alongside their children. They see the basis of their programme as providing children with an interesting environment where they are allowed the space to develop their own interests with the support of respectful, caring adults. The programme and environment are based around 16 areas of play that playcentres aim to have available each session. These are: "Collage, Painting, Dough, Sand, Carpentry, Blocks, Puzzles, Family Corner, Water, Books, Music, Puppets, Science, Finger Paints, Physically Active Play, and Clay". Adults see their role as supporting child-initiated play, creativity, and experiences. They believe in recognising and accepting differences between children in terms of their abilities and knowledge. They see teaching children strategies for learning, and looking after themselves and each other, as important aspects of their programme.

Assessment and Evaluation Prior to the Project

Before the project began, the playcentre did not have any formal systems for assessing children's learning, programme planning, or evaluation. The 1998 playcentre supervisor said that apart from having produced and displayed a "core curriculum poster" for the centre, she had not used Te Whāriki in her work there. Both the 1998 and the 1999 supervisor described Te Whāriki as being useful as a philosophical "reference document" and expressed difficulty in seeing how it could relate to the centre on a daily basis. All but one of the playcentre parents were unfamiliar with Te Whāriki.

Action Research/Professional Development Process over the Project

Researcher's Role

The dual role of providing professional development and researching the effectiveness of the framework within this setting was a challenging one. This was because the playcentre was not familiar with the language and practice of assessment, planning, and evaluation in early childhood education. The researcher spent some time during the course of the project presenting information about, and discussing assessment with, the action research core group. There was a need to strike a balance between assisting the core group to develop a clearer understanding of the purposes and practicalities of assessment and evaluation, with the need to trial some action research tools based on the framework.

Centre Dynamics and Initiatives

Soon after the start of the project the playcentre participants began trying out a system for planning and assessment using ideas and documentation from another playcentre.

The core group at the centre was made up of parents and the centre supervisor. There was a change of supervisor halfway through the project. Because the playcentre was managed and operated on a voluntary basis, attending research meetings as well as the regular ones was a major commitment for parents and supervisors. The playcentre's level of involvement in the project was affected by a drop in numbers of children attending at the beginning of 1999. The smaller number of families meant that the workload involved with the running of the centre was spread among fewer people, and the parents and supervisor did not feel able to take on a new action research cycle at that time.

Tools Trialled

The first tool trialled was based on the strand of Belonging and the child's question: *"Do you know me?"* Parents made observations of individual children and filled out questionnaires focused on children's interests, strengths, and routines. This process was useful in developing some people's knowledge of individual children and their needs and in encouraging the playcentre's commitment to developing a more comprehensive and ongoing system of assessment linked to planning. Most of the core group felt they needed to learn more about and practise observation skills and that this would improve the value of the information they would collect. Reflection on the data collected was delayed by the need to consult more widely with the parent group about privacy and confidentiality. There was a general consensus that choosing a strand, child's question, and action research tool had not been a good way for this centre to begin the project. The parents and supervisor had felt confused about the framework, what they were doing and why they were doing it.

The next tool trialled by the playcentre involved parents bringing along a questionnaire about their child to an assessment meeting where the supervisor also took part. Each parent took turns to share the information about their child's interests, strengths, abilities, routines, and developing skills. They had also identified specific goals for their child. They then used the child's questions and learning dispositions to discuss their child's experiences and needs at the playcentre. The child's questions were seen as a catalyst for thinking about the children from a different perspective. The questions drew out information and ideas that parents had not thought about when filling out their questionnaires. Issues related to children developing trust and stronger relationships with adults in the centre arose and were discussed and planned for. The playcentre participants decided to repeat this process regularly, as part of their planning for individual children, and to incorporate evaluating individual plans at subsequent meetings.

The core group met to plan for trialling a self-evaluation tool focusing on adults' interactions with children just prior to the end of the project.

The playcentre group preferred to use tools that involved a minimal amount of writing and found that the framework began to make more sense to them when they used it to discuss their own and others' children, rather than to reflect on written observations. Most parents found the framework difficult to understand and interpret, although the core group was starting to become familiar with it towards the end of the project. Because the playcentre had

trialled such a small number of tools using the framework, it is difficult to discuss the usefulness of the child's questions in detail. At the conclusion of the project the core group was of the opinion that using the child's questions and learning dispositions was helping them to develop a clearer understanding of each strand of Te Whāriki. In particular, they found the child's questions easier to relate to, use, and understand as a starting place for assessment and planning than the text of Te Whāriki.

Issues about the Framework

The parents and supervisors at Justsence Playcentre raised several issues about the new requirements of the revised DOPs for assessment and evaluation and these also influenced how they perceived the framework. Because the centre operated on a part-time, voluntary basis there was some resistance about increasing demands on the adults' time to provide written evidence of assessment, planning, and evaluation processes. The parents and supervisor also found formulating their ideas into written plans very difficult, especially when they tried to relate their ideas to the text of Te Whāriki which they found difficult to understand. This was frustrating because they found it relatively easy to reflect and plan when discussing children. There were also concerns that time spent observing during sessions took adults away from interacting with children. This was of particular concern because of the short amount of time children attended the centre for each week.

For this centre, it is possible that trying out Learning Story observations would have been a better starting place for becoming familiar with the framework than isolating one strand and child's question. Benefits of taking an initial Learning Story approach may have been: developing confidence and skills in observing, learning about assessment through practical means, and learning about centre children through focusing on their play. Being able to use any of the strands and child's questions to interpret the data collected from learning story observations may have been less challenging (and more holistic) than a focus on one.

Lakeside Kindergarten

Action Research Facilitator: Bernadette Macartney

We wouldn't have got to where we are now without the project in our observation and planning processes. We would have still been stuck doing the RAPIDs[1]*. With the RAPIDs we were using stock sayings and comments and it wasn't really meaningful. What we are doing now is more personal and targeted on each particular child. The project has made us a lot clearer. I feel like I have gained a lot of clarity whereas before I felt confused and bogged down with it all.* (Teacher, Lakeside Kindergarten)

Descriptive Observations about the Centre

Lakeside Kindergarten is situated in a suburb on the outskirts of a city. The kindergarten has three teaching staff members. Two of the staff have a two-year Kindergarten Teaching Diploma and the third teacher has the three-year Diploma of Teaching ECE. This staff member went on a year's leave five weeks after the project began and was replaced by a teacher who is also a parent at the centre and has a Kindergarten Diploma. All staff are Pakeha women.

Forty-four children are enrolled for each session. There are two groups in attendance at the centre. Children start at three years and nine months and attend for three two-and-a-half-hour sessions per week. At around four-and-a-half years they start attending five mornings a week for three-hour sessions. Staff have two afternoons a week non-contact time for assessment, planning, evaluation, administration, and other duties. Parents are invited to stay and help during sessions to support the running of the programme. Parent help is optional. The centre is housed in a purpose-built building with large and very well-resourced indoor and outdoor areas. Staff see the centre parents and community as very supportive and appreciative of their work. They also describe the community as quite "close-knit" and supportive of each other as well as new families to the centre or area. The centre families come from mainly a Pakeha/New Zealand European background. The seven non-Pakeha children are of Samoan, Asian, and Maori descent. There are a large number of double-income families and most families come from a middle to upper income bracket. Of the two main schools children leave the kindergarten to attend, one has a decile rating of 10 and the other 9.

Philosophy of the Centre

Staff describe their educational programme as free-play based. They believe in children learning through self-directed, active participation in hands-on experiences. They base their progamme on the children's interests and facilitate a mixture of emergent and adult-initiated activities. They believe that the activities and environment they provide allow children to

[1] The letters of the acronym stand for: Routines, Abilities, Play, Interests, and an overall summary of a child's "Day" in the centre.

learn at their own levels of competence and also allow choices based on children's interests. There is an emphasis in their programme on children doing things for themselves and developing independence. The experiences they provide are open ended so that things can be done several ways to allow for children's creativity and involvement. They see the adults in the centre as working and relating in ways that are positive and affirming.

Assessment and Evaluation Prior to the Project

The staff regularly made anecdotal observations of children and summarised these using a "RAPIDs" framework. The parents of the morning children were given a questionnaire at this time asking about their child's interests and abilities, goals they had for their child at kindergarten and any feedback they wanted to give to staff about the centre. This information was kept in individual manila folders in the office and discussed by a staff member with parents, usually when they were collecting their child. Staff discussed individual children's learning, development, and set goals for children during non-contact times. They tried to incorporate these goals into their overall programme planning, and to link them with goals from Te Whāriki. They wanted to work on using Te Whāriki more as a basis for their assessment, planning, and evaluation, rather than a reference document. They wanted to develop a system for assessment, planning, and evaluation that was meaningful, efficient, and made sense!

Action Research/Professional Development Process over the Project

Researcher's Role

The researcher met with centre staff every two to four weeks over the project period. These meetings involved choosing and/or developing action research tools, planning for carrying them out, reflecting on the action research process and the data collected using the framework, and discussing the implications of what they had found for further planning. The staff enjoyed receiving continuing input, encouragement, and feedback from another early childhood professional. They often used the researcher as a sounding board and asked for her opinion and advice on the issues that arose and were being addressed throughout the project. The researcher played less of a leading role as the staff's confidence and ability to trial and experiment with ideas increased over the course of the project.

Centre Dynamics and Initiatives

Kindergarten staff were anxious at the beginning of the project about needing to develop a more comprehensive system of observation and planning for individual children within the centre. The start of the project coincided with the release of the revised DOPs. The teachers felt nervous about how they could develop a system that would meet the new requirements, was useful, not too time-consuming and supported their "hands on" work with children and families. They felt unclear about how they could go about developing such a system and hoped that the project could help them in doing this.

Tools Trialled

Early on in the project, the staff began to collect information from written observations, anecdotes, photographs, examples of children's work, stories, and information from home in individual "Learning Story" books for each child. The initial focus was on the Belonging strand and the child's question: *"Do you know me?"* Later they began summarising this information alongside their professional knowledge of each child using each strand of Te Whāriki as in the Learning Story framework.

Towards the end of the project the staff had replaced these summaries with learning story observations of each child. Using the strands of Te Whāriki and the child's questions and dispositions as set out in the framework, they discussed and planned for each child. Part of this process was also evaluative, including reflections on any implications they identified from the observations for the centre programme, environment, their practice, and so on. The trialling of various ways of using a Learning Story-based approach continued throughout the project.

The staff developed a tool based on the Contribution strand and the child's question: *"Is this place fair?"* They collected anecdotal recordings of play situations where children were actively excluded by others. Through this action research cycle they learnt about where and why exclusion was happening between children at the centre, and were better able to articulate their philosophy (teaching story) about fairness and what it meant within their learning and teaching context. This led them to plan and evaluate responses to specific situations.

The final tool the staff developed using the framework focused on a group of children's play that was seen as problematic for a number of reasons. The key child's question was: *"Is this place fair?"* with the staff adding another related question: *"Is there a place for me here?"* Staff found that their thinking about the situation was challenged through using the child's voice. This shifted their thinking from seeing the problem as the group of children to broader issues such as the outdoor programme, adults' roles, equipment, and environment. The tool generated a lot of discussion and several changes were made to the programme as a result.

Issues about the Framework

The staff found that developing a Learning Story approach to assessment had several positive consequences for the centre. Families became more involved in sharing information and goals as well as finding out about their child's involvement in the programme and learning in more detail. The staff felt that the learning story observations they were making and the subsequent discussions and continual planning were interesting and meaningful and could be carried out as an integral part of the programme. They found that their understanding of children's interests and needs and their ability to respond to these had increased.

The experience in this centre showed that it takes time to develop confidence and familiarity with using the framework. This has implications for the provision of professional support, guidance, and encouragement.

A major constraint that the staff regularly raised was the group size and ratios and the impact that this had on the choices they made about assessment and evaluation. They could see some real possibilities and strengths within a Learning Story approach that they felt were

compromised by the number of children attending the centre. In particular they could see how dispositions and interests could be followed and documented as they developed for each child but didn't see this as practical in their setting. The head teacher commented at the conclusion of the project:

> We're much more focused on individual needs although as the weeks go by, with 44 individual plans in process, keeping track has been impossible and the effectiveness lessened considerably. . . . The staffing and ratios work against us because collecting, reflecting on and presenting data is time consuming. Staffing and group size are a major issue.

Summary

The six summary case studies demonstrate the diversity of centre characteristics and philosophies (*see also* Diagram 5), outline assessment and evaluation prior to the project and the subsequent action research and professional development process, provide overviews of the tools trialled, and raise issues about the framework. In chapter 4 these topics are synthesised, and the data on the action research tools are combined and analysed. Key themes, issues, and implications arising from the case studies are addressed in chapter 5.

Diagram 4: Summary of Six Centres

NAME	CENTRE TYPE	CHILDREN	AGES	STRUCTURE	STAFF CO-ORDINATING ADULTS	FAMILIES
Ocean View Playcentre	Playcentre City Suburban	43 Families 21–28 Children	Mostly under 3	6 x 2.5hrs	Combination of paid supervisors and parent duty team	• Mainly middle income • Mainly Pakeha
Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre	City-based full-day co-operative childcare centre	25 places	6 U2 19 O2	Full-day care	4 FT Teachers 2 PT Domestic workers	• Mainly middle income • Broad geographical area • Mainly Pakeha
Asia-Pasifika Kindergarten	Suburban Kindergarten	45 places	3–5 yrs	5 a.m. sessions 3 p.m. sessions	3 FT Teachers High parent involvement	• Mainly low income • Local community • Diverse ethnicity • Samoan, Tongan, Maori, Indian, Cook Is. Maori, Niue
Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre	Privately owned childcare centre	32 places	12 U2 20 O2	Full-day care	6 FT Teachers	• Mainly middle income • Broad geographical area • Mainly Pakeha
Justsence Playcentre	Rural Playcentre	10–16 Familes 10–18 Children	5 mths to 5 yrs	3 x 2.5 hrs	Paid supervisor and duty parents	• Mainly middle/upper income • Mainly Pakeha
Lakeside Kindergarten	Suburban Kindergarten	44 places	3.9 yrs to 5 yrs	5 a.m. sessions 3 p.m. sessions	3 FT Teachers	• Mainly middle/upper income • Local community • Mainly Pakeha

CHAPTER 4

SYNTHESIS OF ACTION RESEARCH DATA

Diagram 4: *Summary of Six Centres* provides a tabled overview of each of the centres whose case study experiences of the action research process were individually summarised in the previous chapter. This chapter synthesises the data further by providing a summary overview of the action research process across the centres. This sets the stage for chapter 5 which will highlight the overall issues and implications of the:

- action research process;
- Learning and Teaching Story framework; and
- use of the child's questions as a tool for self-evaluation in early childhood centres.

Structure

The case study centres are representative of three early childhood services: kindergarten, playcentre, and childcare. While not pretending to cover the diversity within each of these services, we were able to demonstrate the Learning and Teaching Story framework in action across a spectrum:

Staff
untrained, in training, and trained staff
range of qualifications
part-time and full-time staff
permanent and relieving staff
high and regulatory (minimum) staffing ratios
stable and changing staffing arrangements

Families and Children
diverse ethnic and mainly Pakeha families
children from birth to five years of age
middle, low, and high parental income

Management and Location
different building and outdoor settings
rural and urban
private and community ownership

Structure
large and small group size
full-day and part-day provision
mixed-age and separate-age arrangements.

We were not able to demonstrate the framework in settings of mainly Maori families. Nor were we successful in initiating any significant evaluation and reflection that incorporated

management. The issue was mainly due to the timeframe of the research process and the initial focus on children and adults. It was also an issue of management structure. In the playcentres and the private childcare centre there was a more seamless arrangement between practitioners and management. In these settings the management aspects of the evaluation process were more apparent.

Philosophy

The philosophy of care and education expressed by the centres in the study is linked to some of the elements listed above. In each case, the centres also articulated to the researcher a philosophy underpinning individual centre programmes for the children and their families.

What was of interest to the researchers was the degree to which centres expressed and or demonstrated a familiarity with the Principles, Strands, and Goals of Te Whāriki. There was not necessarily a clear connection between the philosophical statements by the centres about their programmes and their actual programme planning, which was more likely to incorporate, for example, the Strands or Goals of Te Whāriki in some way. This was to be expected. The centres selected for study had not been part of recent professional development programmes. The intention of the project was to trial the framework in centres where participants might be less familiar with Te Whāriki than had been the case with the previous evaluation project (Podmore & May with Mara, 1998).

The extent to which different centres' philosophies were connected to the Principles, Strands, and Goals of Te Whāriki is summarised below.

- Participants from one centre described their philosophy fully, using the language and frameworks of Te Whāriki. Two of the senior practitioners at this centre had had a thorough grounding in the principles and practices of Te Whāriki during their initial teacher training during the development years of Te Whāriki earlier in the decade. These practitioners were very confident with Te Whāriki and this highlighted for the researchers the crucial impact of training in terms of implementing Te Whāriki. This was an exception in this study.
- Practitioners from another centre expressed a philosophical commitment to Te Whāriki, but this was less explicit in terms of the language used for planning and practice.
- Participants from the other centres provided philosophical statements quite compatible with Te Whāriki with such views as: free play, choice for children, warm relationships, parent involvement, supporting child-initiated activities, acknowledging the difference in style and pace of children's learning. They did not, however, explicitly articulate the language of Te Whāriki in their philosophical statements.
- The two playcentres derived their approach to planning primarily from the 16 play areas that have traditionally made up playcentres' programmes. These areas of play shaped the parents' thinking on the programme for children in terms of particular activities rather than Goals or aims (Strands) for children as expressed in Te Whāriki. These areas of play are a strong part of playcentre training and documentation.

Prior Experiences of Assessment and Evaluation

At five out of the six centres, practitioners were using the Strands and/or Goals of Te Whāriki as a basis for planning, and to some extent for assessment and evaluation. Planning according to Te Whāriki was, however, often based on a somewhat arbitrary selection of particular goals, that appeared to the researchers as sometimes tentative and cosmetic.

The following excerpts about prior experiences and practices at two of the centres provide examples of these points.

- Participants at one playcentre were totally unfamiliar with Te Whāriki and had no process of planning, assessment, and evaluation in place.
- Participants at a kindergarten operated a framework for child observation called RAPIDS, quite popular in one area of New Zealand. They were then using this as a basis for planning and then making links to Te Whāriki.

Programme planning and assessment and evaluation processes were usually unconnected in the six centres in this study. There was more formality and purpose regarding planning. It was often issue driven arising from particular problems. Assessment and evaluation processes tended to be "on the wing". Practitioners were often compiling child profile books and observations but these might be unconnected to planning, although they were used for feedback to parents. All the centres were keen for some guidance on how to use Te Whāriki as a basis for assessment and evaluation and were keen for something that that would streamline the processes of planning as well as achieve something that was "meaningful".

In some centres practitioners focused their observations on a selected group of children as a way of streamlining the process. This was sometimes associated with primary care-giving arrangements.

Time overload was a key factor affecting the ability of practitioners to engage in planning, assessment, and evaluation processes. This is a key issue that can counter policy initiatives to improve quality in early childhood programmes.

Action Research Process

Participants from all of the centres were keen to take part in the research trial; the centres remained in the study for the full year, and at the end, the participants felt that the process was only really beginning. A key motivator was that senior practitioners were generally anxious about increasing requirements for accountability and saw a need for assessment and evaluation processes that were useful but efficient. The dynamics of the action research process were quite different for each and best understood from the case study data of chapter 3. Some general statements about the process can be made in relation to knowledge about and confidence with Te Whāriki, the process of change, constraints, and trialling of action research tools.

Knowledge about and Confidence with Te Whāriki

Differences in the process of the action research were attributable in part to the extent of the centre practitioners' prior knowledge about and confidence with Te Whāriki. Examples of relevant experiences are outlined and discussed below.

- Centres with highly trained staff who had some knowledge and confidence about Te Whāriki, were demonstrating an ability to implement the framework with considerable understanding, insight, and excitement about what they were learning about children, and were then planning accordingly.
- Less confident staff required more guidance from the action research facilitators and covered less ground. Nevertheless, they too felt a growing confidence and excitement and were moving towards planning decisions. One centre in particular demonstrated what is possibly a quite common phenomenon—the wish by staff for something more "prescriptive" rather than being "forced" through the action research process of finding the answers themselves. The process was able to demonstrate to staff that they could achieve this and they did. In this way, the action research process did effectively emancipate practitioners and assisted them to investigate and change reality (Atweh et al., 1998). The action research process took more time than prescriptive approaches, but taking time was positive and constructive.
- The Learning and Teaching Story framework was a useful way of coming to know about and understand Te Whāriki. There will always be centres and/or staff, particularly in some playcentres, for whom Te Whāriki is a new document.

The Process of Change

The case study material summarised in the previous chapter shows how using the framework did change staff behaviours with, and attitudes towards, the children and also parents. In all centres the action research process provided a "form of active learning" for the practitioners, leading to change (McKernan, 1991, p. 43). Several issues arose, related to this process of change.

- There were variations across centres in the extent to which practitioners felt sufficiently confident to appraise and "question" their role as adults. Beginning with the focus on children using Learning Stories was a safer option for some centres, but participants at all centres moved to apply the "children's questions" in a range of contexts.
- The action research process generated opportunities for discussion and debate. This was seen as valuable by the centres but was easier in centres with time built into their working day. Discussion and debate is a crucial aspect of Te Whāriki and at the core of implementing the document as a working curriculum. The Learning and Teaching Story framework was able to operate in a parallel context to the Reflective Questions of Te Whāriki, which were designed as way for centres to begin the process of "weaving" their own curriculum (Carr & May, 1992, 1994).
- Staff turnover and sickness made the implementation of assessment and evaluation processes difficult and inevitably slowed down any processes of change. The staffing issues encountered by some centres must be seen as typical and "normal".

Constraints

Participants at all centres experienced some constraints when implementing the action research process. Three main points are evident from the experiences across the centres.

- Trying to involve all practitioners and in particular large numbers of parents in the process was administratively complex.
- It was apparent that centres with practitioners who were less confident might not use the framework without the support and "discipline" provided by an outsider.
- As stated earlier, the participants were not always able to incorporate management effectively as part of the action research cycle (*see* "further research questions" in chapter 1). This is not to suggest, however, that the inclusion of management in the process is not possible using the framework.

Trialling of Action Research Tools

Participants at the six centres trialled a number of action research tools for self-evaluation. Later, the tools themselves were evaluated by the practitioners, together with the research facilitator. These evaluations refer to the particular conditions and contexts at the time of the trial, the particular contexts of the centres, as well as to the merits of the tools themselves. Details of the circumstances and the discussions are found in the six case studies.

A number of questions framed the analysis and gave the project an indication of:

(i) evaluative tools that were particularly useful to practitioners;

(ii) those evaluative tools that could be useful if criteria were tightened and professional development was available; and

(iii) those tools that did not look as if they should be in any repertoire of useful evaluative tools without considerable adaptation.

Clearly one criterion is whether such tools can lead to and measure a difference, and in the short period of the project the assessment of that criterion was often a conjecture: there was insufficient time to make changes and then evaluate again. But if the tool did not provide precise data, it was unlikely to be able to give a measure of change.

The detailed criteria of merit are set out in chapter 2. Diagram 5: *Summary of the Effectiveness of Self-Evaluation Tools* provides the analysis of the tools trialled. The most successful tools, as indicated by a high proportion of ticks [√], in relation to the eight questions were those that:

- generated the most reflective discussion: they challenged assumptions, they did not "put staff down", they provided data that make sense;
- could be translated into a chart, an accessible and easily read evaluation where the data could graphically reflect change;
- spoke to the interests of the staff and community;
- included peer observations of each other in an atmosphere of trust; some tools included a recommendation that an external "critical friend" would be a useful evaluator; and
- included early discussions and agreement about the criteria involved.

Appendix J: *Description and Effectiveness of the Trialled Action Research Tools* provides further details of the tools used by centres as well as a summary of their effectiveness in relation to the criteria stated above.

Summary

This chapter has summarised the key findings of the trial and the experiences of the six case study centres during the action research processes. The next chapter will provide an overview of the key issues raised by this research in relation to Learning and Teaching Stories as a framework for evaluation and assessment.

Diagram 5: Summary of the Effectiveness of Self-Evaluation Tools

Self-evaluation tool	Capable of surprise, challenging assumptions	Precise	Capable of being analysed	Linked to the child's question in a transparent way	Quick and easy	Capable of starting the analysis and planning process in a short time-frame	Capable of showing that action had made a difference	Capable of energising staff to reflect on their practice
Belonging 1.1 Ocean View Playcentre	√	X (instructions need to be clearer)	√	X (instructions need to be clear)	√	√	√	√
Belonging 1.1 Justsence Playcentre	√	√ (but insufficient)	X	X	√	√	X	X
Belonging 1.2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Belonging 1.3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√ Start point for action	√
Belonging 1.4	√ Affirmed current practice, could provide a surprise	√	√	√	√	√	Affirmed current practice	√
Belonging 1.5 Justsence Playcentre	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Belonging 1.6 Lakeside Kindergarten	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Well-being 2.1	X	X (needed shared criteria)	√	√	X (√ when children were clearly at 1 or 5)	√	X	X

Well-being 2.2	√	√	√	x	√	X	√	√
Well-being 2.3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Well-being 2.4	√	√ If recorded soon after the event	√	√	√	√	√	√
Exploration 3.1	√	x	X (needed to be linked to attendance)	x	√	X	x	√
Exploration 3.2	√	x	x	√	x	√	√	x
Exploration 3.3 Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten	√	x	√	√	x	√	Follow-up after action used 3.2	√
Exploration 3.3 Ocean View Playcentre	√	√ (discussion about criteria for challenge helped)	√(video clips analysed by group)	√	x√	√	√	√
Exploration 3.3 Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre	√	√ (X for *avoiding* difficulty)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Exploration 3.4	√	√	√	X (needs criteria)	x	√	√	x√
Exploration 3.5	√	√ (for physical challenge)	√	√	√	√	X No action taken	√
Exploration 3.6	√	√	√	√	X (needs skill in observation)	√	√	√
Communication 4.1	√	X	√	√	√x	√	√Tool introduced after action taken	√

Communication 4.2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Communication 4.3	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√
Communication 4.4	√	x (√ with a critical friend)	√	√	√	√	√ not considered	x (√ with a critical friend)
Contribution 5.1	√	√	√	√	√ (video)	√	√	√
Contribution 5.2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Contribution 5.3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

CHAPTER 5

ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Two research questions framed this project and a previous project on evaluation:

1. **What are the key features of programme quality in relation to the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki, which should be the focus of evaluation practice?**

The project developed the idea that evaluation of an early childhood programme should be grounded in quality from the *child's perspective*. That perspective was articulated as five *"child's questions"* that reflected the five strands of curriculum in Te Whāriki.

2. **How can these features be implemented into a framework for curriculum evaluation?**

The second research question was answered by the development of the idea of *"action research self-evaluation tools"* that programmes could choose from and adapt to accommodate local contexts. A number of these tools were trialled, and although a proportion of these received a judgment of high merit (using eight criteria or standards of merit) from practitioners and researchers, the outcome of the project is to do with the process of evaluation as action research rather than to do with the development of a finite set of self-evaluation tools. The development of these as a resource for practitioners is envisioned as a follow-on project to this one.

Action Research Tools for Self-Evaluation

However, we did have some conclusions about the tools as well. The tools that received the highest level of merit, in terms of acceptance and utility, from the practitioners and researchers (*see* diagram 5, the details of the tools in appendix J, and comments from the practitioners in the case study chapter) were those that:

(i) generated the most reflective discussion: they challenged assumptions and provided data that made sense (for example, 5.1 Ocean View Playcentre). 5.1 Ocean View Playcentre received high merit perhaps because potential episodes of inclusion or exclusion were videoed, and rich discussions about inclusion and exclusion and their criteria developed after the event.

(ii) included early discussions about criteria (*see*, for example, 3.3 Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre and 4.3 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre). 4.3 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre developed from a list of good practices generated at an earlier staff retreat.

(iii) did not "put staff down". Many of the tools in which staff observed each other included examples of good practice to enable practitioners to develop criteria of good practice (4.4 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre); some tools combined successful episodes with episodes in which practitioners "missed the boat" (e.g. 2.4 Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre).

(iv) included peer observations of each other in an atmosphere of trust; some tools included a recommendation that an external "critical friend" would be a useful evaluator. A number of tools of high merit included episodes of individual staff interactions. These included 2.4 Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre in which the staff collected episodes of their own discussions with children, and 4.3 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre in which staff observed each other. The data were of themselves, and, in an atmosphere of trust, highly motivating for both reflection and change.

(v) could be translated into a chart, an accessible and easily read evaluation where the data could graphically reflect—and therefore encourage—change. In other words, provided the data reflected the construct of interest and were authentic (i.e., other validities applied), the data were robust. Precise data could often be translated into charts of incidence (charts or data on grids that were developed for tools that received high merit were attached to 1.2 and 2.3 Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre, 3.5 and 3.6 Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten, 4.2 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre, and 5.2 Lakeside Kindergarten). Charts are particularly accessible and helpful for practitioners, to portray current practice and to reflect any later change.

(vi) spoke to the interests of the staff and community. The nature of the service and the community were important variables, and the "catalytic" validity of a tool (whether it was capable of energising staff to reflect on their practice) was greatly enhanced when the evaluation was on target to reflect the interests of staff and/or parents in a particular setting.

In a playcentre for instance, one of the evaluation tools that galvanised the parents (1.5 Justsence Playcentre) was when the parents filled out a questionnaire on their own child about the child's strengths, routines, and developing skills both at home and the centre, and each parent shared this information with the others at parents' meetings. What emerged as of particular interest was that children were often developing their interests and talents at home, but not necessarily at the centre, and evaluation discussions about the programme emerged from these data.

In a multicultural kindergarten in which English was more likely than not to be the second language and where the relationship with the families was highly valued, the tools that energised the staff were two parent surveys during which staff were given time to act as scribes for families and interpreters were available for four languages (and even before any changes were planned from the data, family interest and participation increased as a result of the action research process).

These features provided fertile ground for high levels of interpretive validity or standards of merit. The eight standards of merit that were applied to the tools are outlined in the methodology section. However, as discussed in the methodology chapter, there are further types of standard or validity that need to be addressed when the *overall evaluation programme* is the focus: **convergence** (whether several sources of data—tools—are employed for each child's question of interest), **collaboration** (whether all participants are involved), **equity** (whether multiple ways of knowing and thinking and communicating are incorporated), and **agreement** (whether different perspectives are included). Every centre trialled a number of different tools within at least one child's question of interest, and all centres were therefore reaching for **convergence**. However,

collaboration, agreement, and equity criteria focused on the perspectives of families and practitioners. Two voices were not clearly heard: the voice of the child and the voice of management. The evaluative framework featured five child's questions, and there are a number of ways in which children's opinions can be sought about matters that interest them. These could form a follow-on research project, as could ways of including the role of management.

Many of the tools needed more precise criteria, and although in some cases the centres could and did develop their own, to reflect their particular programme, some guidance for this in a resource document would clearly be helpful for them.

The Action Research Process as a Process for Self-Evaluation[2]

A number of key features of the action research process as a process for self-evaluation emerged during the project:

- the process enabled increasing collaboration and reflective discussion;
- aspects of diversity were relevant;
- the effectiveness of the action research tools to reflect and enhance practices was influenced by structural factors, relationships, and assumptions about professional development;
- the importance of partnerships between insider and outsider;
- the process enabled a shift in focus towards the child's perspective; and
- the process enabled a shift in focus towards reflection.

Increasing Collaboration

This was action research for professional development, with evaluation of the programme as a focus. However, although many centres trialled tools that had been originally devised by the project directors and researchers, the process was not "top down"; increasingly the staff (or, in the playcentres, the parents) took the process over, adapted the tools, and rejected those tools that did not seem to provide data that enabled them to reflect directly on the programme's response to the children's questions.

Aspects of Diversity

The framework both supported and highlighted some of the difficulties with diversity. The diversity of the centres meant there were very different levels of knowledge and confidence in assessment practices and in working with Te Whāriki. For some participants it was their first attempt at written observations and assessments of children. In other centres staff were familiar with these processes but were nevertheless grappling with how to make them manageable and useful. Although it was self-evaluation tools that were the focus, one of the centres began assessment of the children using a Learning Story book for each child, and assessment discussion developed into evaluation discussions which the centre practitioners perceived as having a high level of merit. For centres at the novice end of the continuum both the learning story framework and the child's questions helped participants make more sense of the curriculum document itself.

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[2] This section is taken mostly from the section on issues in the Project symposium at the 7th Early Childhood Convention, written and presented by the researchers—Pam Cubey, Ann Hatherly, and Bernadette Macartney.

while for those already acquainted with Te Whāriki, the framework was judged to be a good balance between giving direction and allowing flexibility. So, in this sense, the framework catered well for the diversity of the centres involved.

The researchers have pointed out that the framework on its own is not a panacea for improvement. While the children's questions seem simple enough on the surface, they do in fact deal with complex and quite abstract concepts. They also assume a depth of understanding of how children learn and of assessment purposes and practices which was not evident in all centres. In hindsight, the researchers all felt that they would have liked to have spent more time introducing the learning stories framework in the beginning. Yet to do this they really needed to spend time exploring learning dispositions (and the skills and knowledge associated with them), which, in turn, call for a study of what participants value in young children's learning and why.

Effectiveness of Action Research Tools

Structural factors, relationships, demands of busy centres, and assumptions about professional development either enabled or constrained the utility of the action research self-evaluation tools to reflect and enhance practice. The intention of the project was that after a year's involvement, centres would be in a position to continue developing their own tools without the support of a facilitator (the researcher). All the researchers found that the first six months was a preparatory period in which they got to know the centres and allowed the centres time to "come to grips" with the idea of self-evaluation and research. The notion of doing research was a barrier for many. Some said at the beginning that they wanted to be given the answers to questions about how they were doing. One said "I'm not of the generation where you have to find the answers. I'm used to waiting for someone to tell me what to do". Although not all centres can readily access professional development, the value of long-term professional development was highlighted in this project.

High levels of demand from the community, together with average levels of staff illness and changes to centre management, consumed the energies of participants. Staff or parent meetings that had allocated time to discuss the project and reflect on the evaluation process were sometimes diverted by the typical demands on a profession that works with young children and their families, many of whom are finding it difficult to cope and turn to their child's alternative carers for help and reassurance.

The process of action research highlighted the desirability of low staff/parent turnover in centres. A strong team that remained constant, and whose members respected and trusted each other as equal participants, was an asset to progress. It allowed those involved to take greater risks and therefore to develop more powerful tools.

The Importance of Partnerships Between Insider and Outsider

In their feedback practitioners/parents talked about how necessary it had been to have an outsider to guide them and keep them on task. Some of the tools (for example, 4.4 Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre) included a brainstorm of subquestions (in this case a subset of *"Do you hear me?"* for the under-twos), and recommended a "critical friend" as an evaluator who would assist staff to develop criteria for the achievement of an affirmative to those subquestions and then observe the programme with those criteria in mind. It was often difficult for the practitioners/parents to observe themselves. (During

the project, this process was successfully trialled in an early childhood centre in Corby, England, developing a subset of *"Do you know me?"* to evaluate the transition from one programme to another for a small group of children, after a visit from one of the researchers and one of the directors. The "critical friend", a visiting professor from a nearby university, was already a welcome and trusted evaluator and professional development facilitator at the centre).

The researchers however have emphasised the value in the relationship between insider and outsider of having at least one enthusiastic and knowledgeable insider who could model the ability to reflect and critique her own and the centre's practice.

A Shift in Focus Towards the Child's Perspective

The case studies describe shifts in interest from activities to children's questions, and from a concern for external accountability to a concern for pedagogy. Centre participants that had previously seen planning as being about deciding what activities to provide began to see that the prior questions came from the children's voice: *Is this place fair?* for example. In particular, many of them became interested in criteria for responsive and reciprocal relationships between learners and people, places, and things (a pedagogical principle in Te Whāriki) by investigating and evaluating their own conversational styles and interactions, and episodes of peer inclusion and exclusion.

A Shift in Focus Towards Reflection

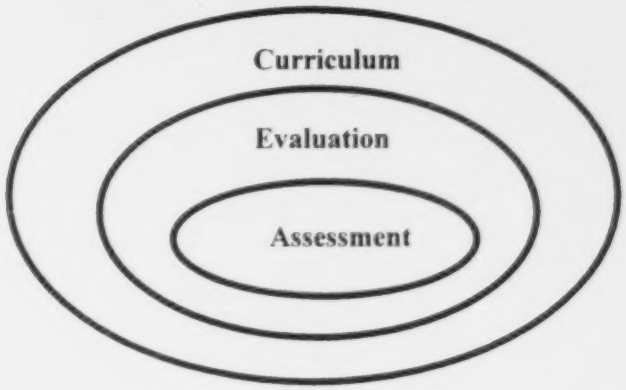
If there was one criterion of merit that was of key importance, it was that the process should engender rich discussion of criteria of quality and appropriate pedagogical practice for achieving that quality. Gradually, practitioners began to trial tools that included an element of personal risk: those in which their own interactions were analysed and reflected on. Although the project began with questions about quality that were positioned from the *child's* point of view, it provided opportunities for *adults* to investigate their own pedagogy and practices.

Implications for Early Childhood Self-Evaluation Practices

A number of implications emerge from the discussion in this chapter, the case studies, and the discussion in previous chapters, and these will be outlined briefly here.

- Assessment, evaluation, and curriculum implementation need to be closely integrated. The Project for Assessing Children's Experiences had argued strongly for formative assessment to be nested within curriculum implementation. This project is about formative self-evaluation, and an integrated system of assessment, evaluation, and curriculum means that assessment is part of evaluation and they are both part of curriculum implementation. They are not add-ons (*see* Diagram 6: *An Integrated Process)*. This project illustrated this connection very clearly.

Diagram 6: An Integrated Process



- Time was important. This emerged from the project, and research on professional development has also supported it. One of the strong features of the process of curriculum implementation in early childhood education in New Zealand is that practitioners have been given time to weave their own programmes from the national framework in Te Whāriki. Time will also be needed as they develop assessment and evaluation systems that reflect their programmes. At the end of the year's trial, some of the centres were beginning to develop their own self-evaluation tools.
- The reality of centres must be part of the given environment. Demands from families, requirements from management, typical levels of turnover in a low-paid profession, staff upgrading their qualifications, staff picking up children's illnesses, staff meetings outside working hours, large group sizes: all these are part of the typical life of an early childhood educator. They mean that documented evaluation procedures will often be delayed. It is an important role for professional development to establish a culture of reflection on practice, in an atmosphere of trust and support. But establishing that culture cannot rest on the shoulders of professional development alone: without well-qualified practitioners, whose qualifications have included considerable experience in critical reflection on their own practice, even the best of professional development will be likely to have a weak and short-term impact. Management will need to play a role as well: in early childhood services, especially those that feature long days and shift work, lack of time for discussion and reflection is a constraint on collaboration and agreement.
- Documentation is important, especially if it is accessible. Although the documentation is time consuming, it is an important part of the process, especially if evaluative data can be easily read as a chart or a graph. The project accommodated a range of documentation styles, and the more narrative styles suited some practitioners better; they could retain the context, and the evaluation remained "grounded" in the life of the centre.
- Diversity must be accommodated. The project enabled evaluation procedures to work within a diverse range of pace, style, level of understanding of pedagogy and curriculum, demands from the community, and commitment of the adults.

Co-ordination with the "Quality Journey"

This project has worked closely with Anne Meade and Anne Kerslake-Hendricks, co-ordinators of the Ministry of Education's recently released *Quality Journey*, to keep the two systems closely aligned. These alignments have been set out in appendix D: *Links Between Evaluation Projects* (Carr, May, Mead, & Podmore 1999). It will be important for practitioners to see connections between systems, and their joint connection to DOPs and Te Whāriki the curriculum (the framework of goals in Te Whāriki is clearly set out as a requirement in Part 5 of DOPs).

Follow-on Research

There is clearly a need for further research and for resource development. The project has generated the following suggestions for follow-on research.

- This project worked in a narrow range of three services. The same research questions about evaluation as action research, with some self-evaluation tools as starting points, should be the topic of research in a wider range of settings: Pacific Islands early childhood centres for instance.
- A longitudinal project in a few centres that explores the action research process for self-evaluation over a period of more than one year is recommended to enable practitioners and researchers to establish more detailed criteria for evaluation tools of interest, and to enable researchers to document the pace, possibilities, and the constraints for implementing change.
- This research emphasised the viewpoints of practitioners and families. A research project that seeks ways to incorporate the child's voice within an evaluation system would provide valuable data for the early childhood field.
- The role of management was not featured here; the voice of management, and management processes and policies that contribute to the child's questions, would also contribute useful data on evaluation in early childhood. There is an opportunity to explore ways in which a staff appraisal system (a requirement of DOPs, item 11) can be developed that incorporates Learning and Teaching Stories.
- There is considerable scope to link in a more explicit way the framework of Learning and Teaching Stories with the Ministry of Education's priority areas of early literacy and numeracy.

Conclusion: Follow-on Resource

This project's action research trials show how a Learning and Teaching Stories approach, using the child's questions and related action research tools, empowered practitioners towards reflective assessment and self-evaluation.

Finally, then, it is most important that a resource on evaluation using the "child's questions" is developed for practitioners that sits alongside the assessment videos (Carr, 1998b). Both resources would link to Te Whāriki and DOPs and would be grounded in New Zealand-based research.

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Smith, A. B. (1996b, December). *Quality childcare and joint attention.* Paper presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Nelson Polytechnic.

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Sobstad, F. (1997). *National program for the kindergarten in Norway: A framework for reflection in action.* Paper presented at Curriculum Seminar, Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education, Norway.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PROJECT FLYER

LEARNING AND TEACHING STORIES

an approach to assessment and evaluation in early childhood

An action research project to develop approaches to holistic assessment and evaluation in early childhood centres based on the principles and strands of Te Whāriki

This project is funded by the Research Division of the Ministry of Education

The project will work alongside three Ministry of Education contracts for early childhood professional development programmes in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland. In each area a co-ordinator-researcher will work with two centres in 1998-99 to trial some approaches to assessment and evaluation in the course of on-going programme planning in the centre.

Co-Directors:

Val Podmore
New Zealand Council for Educational Research
PO Box 3237, Wellington

Margaret Carr
University of Waikato
PO Box 3105, Hamilton

Helen May
Institute for Early Childhood Studies
Victoria University Wellington
PO Box 600, Wellington

This current project follows on from two earlier Ministry of Education funded projects

- Carr, M (1998) *Project for Assessing Children's Experiences. Final Report to the Ministry of Education.* University of Waikato
- Podmore, V. May, H. with Mara, D. (1998) *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using the Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki, the National Early Childhood Curriculum. Final Report on Phases One and Two to the Ministry of Education.* New Zealand Council for Educational Research (available for $27.00 from NZCER Distribution Services, P O Box 3237, Wellington)

The first stages of this research on evaluation and assessment developed holistic approaches to:

(i) Assessment using

LEARNING STORIES THAT EMPOWER LEARNERS AND COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES
(Carr, University of Waikato)

(ii) Evaluation using

TEACHING STORIES THAT CREATE RESPONSIVE RECIPROCAL AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE PLACES AND THINGS
(May IECS, Podmore and Mara, NZCER)

LEARNING AND TEACHING STORIES

are facilitated by adults:

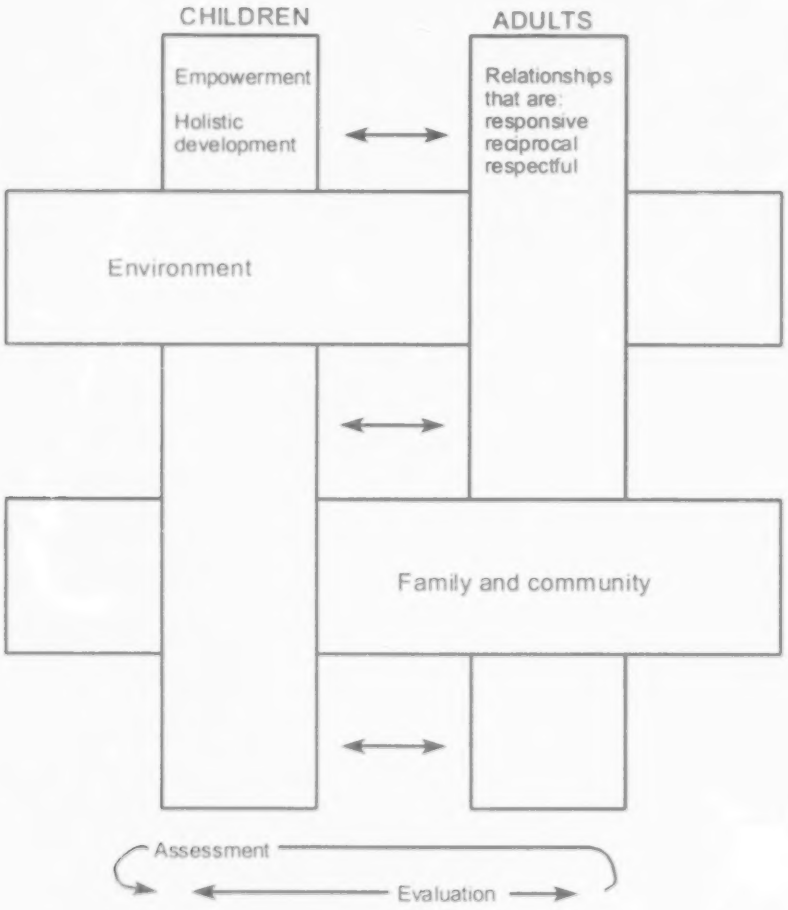
- **observing and listening to children**
- **providing a learning environment**
- **making connections with family and community**
- **being supported by management policies and processes**

A summary publication describing this work called *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in relation to Te Whāriki* by Carr, May and Podmore is available for $12 from the Institute for Early Childhood Studies.

There is also a parallel project underway co-ordinated by Diane Mara at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Implementation of Te Whāriki in Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres.

APPENDIX B

A Holistic Framework for Evaluation and Assessment



APPENDIX C

NEW ZEALAND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH

1998–1999

Papers/talks presented to date (from April 1998) when the current project began:

1998

Podmore, V. N. & May, H. (1998, 29 April). *New research evaluating early childhood programmes using the strands and goals of Te Whāriki.* Presentation by Val Podmore at the Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Carr, M. (1998, 30 April). One-day assessment workshop to practitioners: *Assessing the Important Things for Good Reason.* University of Waikato Professional Support and Development Programme and Assessment of Children's Experiences Research Contract. April 30.

Carr, M. (1998, 20 May). *Current Research in Early Childhood: Learning Dispositions and Stories.* Address to the Auckland Chapter of OMEP.

Carr, M. (1998, 28 October). *Assessment in Early Childhood: What Should We Look For?* Workshop at Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago.

Carr, M. (1998, 29 October). *What to assess? Why assess? How assess?* Workshop to Otago Free Kindergarten Association, Dunedin.

Carr, M. (1998, 30 October). *Thinking About Assessment in Early Childhood.* Workshop to kindergarten teachers, Southland Free Kindergarten Association, Invercargill.

Carr, M. (1998, 22 October). *Learning Stories for Managers.* Workshop for early childhood management network, Hamilton.

Carr, M. (1998, 23 November). *Assessment and Evaluation: Learning dispositions.* Workshop with kindergarten teachers in Waikato Kindergarten Association.

Carr, M. (1998, 26 November). Follow-up workshop on *Assessing the Important Things for Good Reason.* University of Waikato Professional Support and Development Programme and Assessment of Children's Experiences Research Contract, Hamilton.

Carr, M., May, H., & Podmore, V. N. (1998, 13–15 November). *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluations in Relation to Te Whāriki.* Workshop presented by Helen May at the annual conference of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, Auckland.

Symposium

Three papers constituted the Symposium presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, 4 December 1998 in Dunedin. *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in relation to Te Whāriki—*

Carr, M. (1998). *Project for Assessing Children's Experiences.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, D. Mara, & V. Podmore.

May, H., & Podmore, V. N. (1998). *Project for Developing a Framework for Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood Programmes.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, D. Mara, & V. Podmore.

Mara, D. (1998). *Implementation of Te Whāriki in Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, D. Mara, & V. Podmore.

Carr, M., May, H., & Podmore, V. N. (1998, 7 December). *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluations in Relation to Te Whāriki.* Seminar presented by Val Podmore and Helen May at the Christchurch College of Education, Christchurch.

1999

Podmore, V. N. & Cubey, P. (1999, 12 February). *New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education.* Paper based on Te Whāriki assessment and evaluation research by M. Carr, H. May, & V. N. Podmore, presented at a joint workshop co-ordinated by H. Walker, D. Launder, & J. Burgon, in the session "Towards the Future—Innovation and Managing Risk" at the Ministry of Education's Internal Conference, Empowering Education, Victoria University, Wellington.

Plenary Symposium

Presented at the Seventh Early Childhood Convention, 27–30 September in Nelson: *New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation: Learning and Teaching Stories*

Project Directors:	Margaret Carr, Helen May, and Val Podmore
Researchers:	Diane Mara, Pam Cubey, Ann Hatherly, Bernadette Macartney

Margaret Carr (University of Waikato)
Assessing Children's Learning Using Learning Stories *1995–97*

Helen May (Institute for Early Childhood Studies) and Val Podmore (NZCER)
Evaluation Starting from the Child's Perspective *1998*

Diane Mara (NZCER)
Issues from Pacific Islands Perspectives *1997–98*

Pam Cubey, Ann Hatherly, and Bernadette Macartney
Insights and Vignettes from Learning and Teaching Stories in Action *1998–99*

May, H. (1999, September). *New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation.* Lecture in Quality Programmes, Victoria University, Wellington.

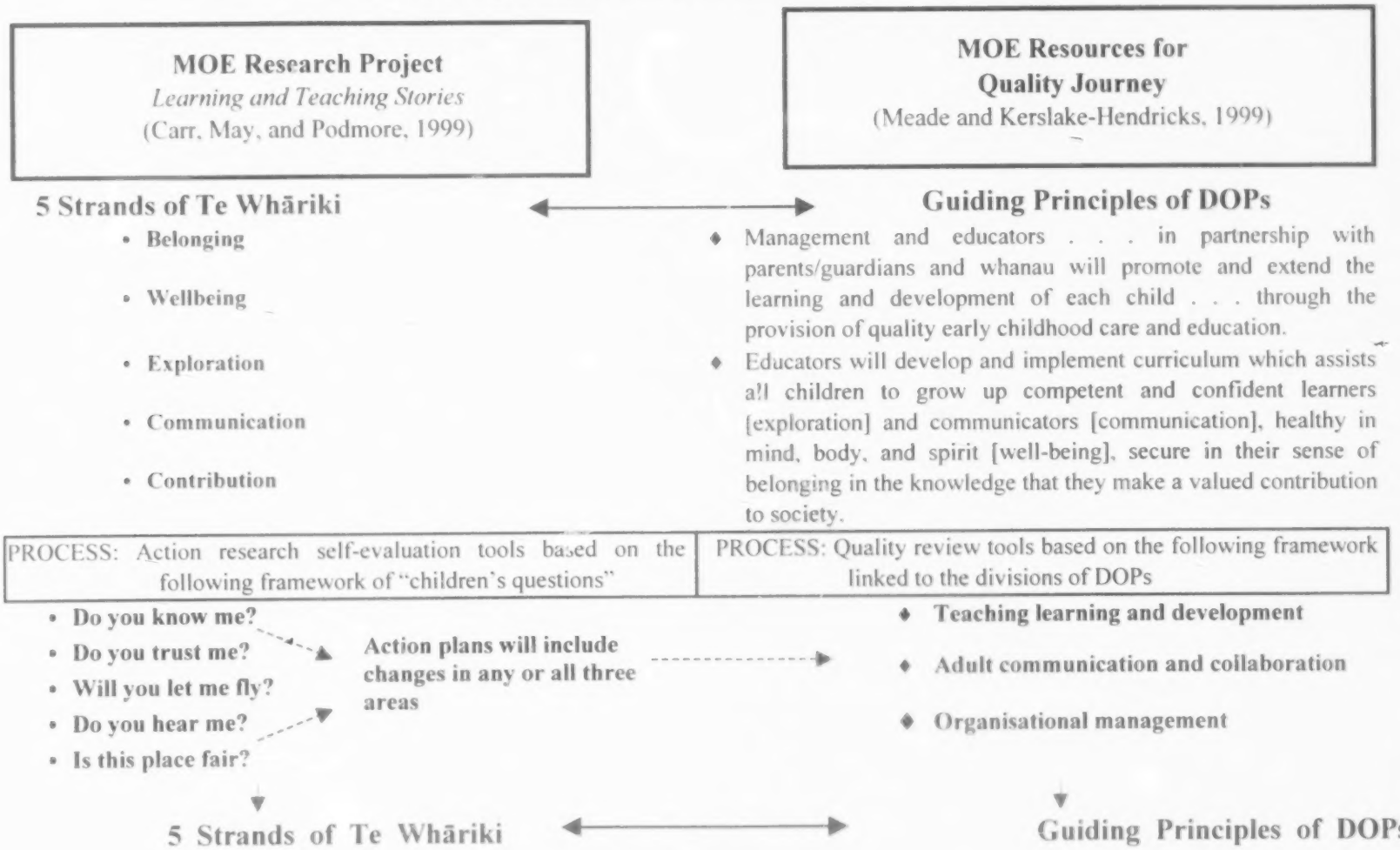
May, H. (1999). *A New Zealand story of a decade of curriculum: Assessment and evaluation 1990-2000.* Seminar to NZCA, OMEP, and NZEI branches in Invercargill, 14 October.

Carr, M. (1999, 19 October). Follow-up workshop on *Assessing the Important Things for Good Reason.* University of Waikato Professional Support and Development Programme and Assessment of Children's Experiences Research Contract, Hamilton.

Aitkin, H., Hatherly, A., & McAllister, T. (1999, 12 November). *Secret Spies and More: Using "Child's Voice" Questions as a Framework for Assessment and Evaluation.* Seminar presented at the Auckland College of Education, Auckland.

APPENDIX D: LINKS BETWEEN EVALUATION PROJECTS

(Carr, May, Meade, and Podmore, September 1999)


MOE Research Project
Learning and Teaching Stories
(Carr, May, and Podmore, 1999)
MOE Resources for Quality Journey
(Meade and Kerslake-Hendricks, 1999)
5 Strands of Te Whāriki
Guiding Principles of DOPs
Belonging
Wellbeing
Exploration
Communication
Contribution
Management and educators . . . in partnership with parents/guardians and whanau will promote and extend the learning and development of each child . . . through the provision of quality early childhood care and education.
Educators will develop and implement curriculum which assists all children to grow up competent and confident learners [exploration] and communicators [communication], healthy in mind, body, and spirit [well-being], secure in their sense of belonging in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.
PROCESS: Action research self-evaluation tools based on the following framework of "children's questions"
PROCESS: Quality review tools based on the following framework linked to the divisions of DOPs
Do you know me?
Do you trust me?
Will you let me fly?
Do you hear me?
Is this place fair?
Action plans will include changes in any or all three areas
Teaching learning and development
Adult communication and collaboration
Organisational management
5 Strands of Te Whāriki
Guiding Principles of DOPs

APPENDIX E

International Dissemination of Research 1998–1999

Papers/talks presented to date (from April 1998, when the project began)

1998

Symposium

Three papers constituted the Symposium *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Relation to Te Whāriki*, presented at the 8th European Conference on Quality in Early Childhood Settings, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2–6 September.

May, H. & Carr, M. (1998, 2–6 Setepmber). *Introduction: An update of Te Whāriki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, & V. Podmore.

Carr, M. (1998). *A Project for Assessing Children's Experiences in Early Childhood Settings.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, & V. Podmore.

May, H. & Podmore, V. N. (1998). *Project for Developing a Framework for Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood Programmes.* Paper presented at the symposium by M. Carr, H. May, & V. Podmore.

Podmore, V. N. (1998, 17–19 September). *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum.* Research by Podmore, V. N. & May, H. Paper presented by Val Podmore at the annual conference of the European Educational Research Association, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

1999

Carr, M. (1999, 27 March). *Assessment in Early Childhood: A View from New Zealand.* Keynote address to Pen Green International Conference on Assessment and Evaluation Assessment in Early Childhood.

Carr, M. (1999, 18 May). *Learning and Teaching Stories: Alternative Views on Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood.* Research seminar at the Thomas Coram Research Institute, University of London.

Carr, M. (1999, 14 April). *Assessing Teachers as Researchers: The Four Ds.* Paper presented at 3rd Warwick International Early Years Conference.

Carr, M. (1999, 2 June). *Learning Dispositions as a Focus for Assessment.* Seminar to Department of Education staff and graduate students, Bristol University.

Carr, M. (1999, 7 April). *Learning Dispositions and Learning Stories*. Seminar to staff at Pen Green Nursery School and Childcare Centre.

Carr, M. (1999, June). *Assessment Using Learning Stories*. Seminar to primary teachers at Christchurch Primary School, Devon, England.

Cubey, P. (1999, 27 March). *Learning and Teaching Stories: An Approach to Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood*. Paper based on research by M. Carr, H. May, V. N. Podmore, P. Cubey, A. Hatherly, & B. Macartney, B., presented at the Conference on Effective Assessment and Evaluation in the Early Years, Pen Green, England.

May, H. (1999, 7 June). *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Relation to Te Whaariki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (1996)*. Presentation based on Te Whāriki assessment and evaluation research by M. Carr, H. May, & V. N. Podmore, presented at the Bernard Van Leer Foundation Headquarters, The Hague, Holland.

May, H. (1999, 7 July). *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation in Relation to Te Whaariki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (1996)*. Presentation based on Te Whāriki assessment and evaluation research by M. Carr, H. May, & V. N. Podmore, presented at the World Bank Human Development Network.

Podmore, V. N., & Carr, M. (1999, 29 November to 3 December). *Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation*. (Research Team: Margaret Carr, Helen May, Val Podmore, Pam Cubey, Ann Hatherly, & Bernadette Macartney.) Paper presented at the AARE-NZARE Conference in Melbourne.

Forthcoming, confirmed invitations

May, H. (2000, 18–19 April). *Politics and Realities of National Curriculum Developments*. (Research Team: M. Carr, H. May, & V. N. Podmore) Paper presented by Helen May at the World Bank Conference, "Investing in our Children's Future", Washington.

May, H. (2001, 23–24 June). *New Experiences of National Curriculum*. Yorkshire Education Authority Conference for Teachers, Birklees, U.K.

International Publications

Carr, M. (1999). Five dispositions for early childhood. *Early Childhood Practice, 1*, 1.

May, H., & Podmore, V. (2000). "Teaching stories": An approach to self-evaluation of early childhood programmes. *European Early Childhood Research Journal, 8* (1).

APPENDIX F

A Framework for Assessment and Evaluation Using Learning and Teaching Stories

	A Learning Story for Children (Carr, 1998)	A Teaching Story for adults		Research and Theoretical Perspectives on Learning for Young Children
	Disposition for Learning	A Child's Voice	Adult Relationships Are Responsive, Reciprocal, and Respectful when they:	
Belonging	Finding anything of interest here	How do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?	Appreciate Understand children and families	Ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); dispositions (Carr, 1997b; Katz, 1993); cultural context (McNaughton, 1995)
Well-being	Being involved	How do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?	Show care and sensitive consideration	Respect (Gerber, 1984); reciprocal sensitive interactions (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebrook, 1992); social space (Katz, 1991); temperament (Thomas, Chess, & Brian, 1970; Kohnstamm, 1988); emotional climate of learning (Smiley & Dweck, 1994)
Exploration	Engaging with challenge and persisting when difficulties arise	How do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world?	Engage children and extend their horizons	Guided participation scaffolding (Bruner, 1995; Vygotsky, 1987); schemas (Meade, 1995); engagement (Pascal, 1996); motivation (Smiley & Dweck, 1994)
Communication	Expressing a point of view	How do you invite me to listen and communicate, and respond to my own particular efforts?	Invite and respond to children's language	Joint attention (Rogoff, 1990); responsive communication (Howes, 1983, 1986); inter-subjectivity (Rogoff, 1990)
Contribution	Taking responsibility	How do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of group?	Encourage and facilitate a role for individuals in a group	Joint attention (Rogoff, 1990); equal power, joint problem solving (Smith, 1996b; Vygotsky, 1987)

APPENDIX G

Action Research Trial of Learning and Teaching Stories

	Phase one 1998			Phase two 1999
	A Child's Voice	***The reflective practitioner*** ART BOX for data collection tools Action research tools =ART including learning stories	(a) Evaluation and assessment discussions in relation to: • management • environment • relationships • family (b) Planning ----------▶	***The teacher as a researcher*** Centre's own learning and teaching framework (own tools)
Belonging	**Do you know me?**	Examples: 1. Parent survey: e.g.: Do they know as much about my family as I want them to know? 2. Staff survey: (a) Random group of children and write down a list of their interest/strength routines (b) After an event, episode, day, what did I find out about how one/two/or several children were today: mood, interests		
Well-being	**Can I trust you?**	1. Time sampling observation of mood-involvement scale happy/involved --- sad/unengaged 2. Survey: list of children: record what they know about their signals of distress/happiness 3. Self-reflection on two episodes followed by peer reflection		
Exploration	**Do you let me fly?**	1. Identifying what is difficult/uncertain for individual children 2. Take an area of play and identify opportunities for the people and environment to create challenges for children		
Communication	**Do you hear me?**	1. Environment rating scale for "100 languages" of learning 2. Observations children not initiating communication or not being "heard"		
Contribution	**Is this place fair for us?**	1. Record and analyse event with "Power on" and "power off" scale 2. Set time observation of children assisting and or being excluded by others		

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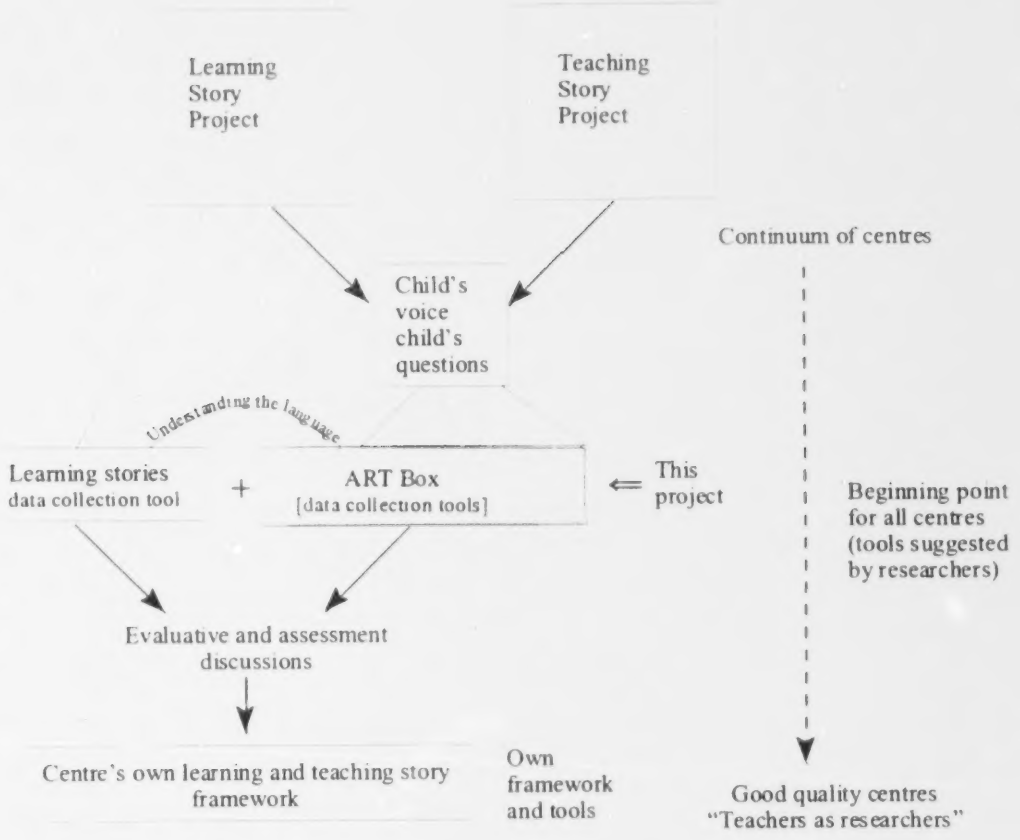
APPENDIX H

Preliminary Action Research Framework


Learning Story Project
Teaching Story Project
Continuum of centres
Child's voice child's questions
Understanding the language
Learning stories data collection tool
+
ART Box [data collection tools]
⇐ This project
Beginning point for all centres (tools suggested by researchers)
Evaluative and assessment discussions
Centre's own learning and teaching story framework
Own framework and tools
Good quality centres "Teachers as researchers"

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APPENDIX I

Suggested Examples of Action Research Tools (ART)

Suggested Examples of Action Research Tools (ART) for Considering "The Child's Voice"

Note: *These Tools are not for staff appraisal/evaluation data, but the data gathered by ART to be used for guiding the direction of the action research process for evaluation of the programme.*

Question 1:
Belonging

How do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family? **DO YOU KNOW ME?**

1.1 **Parent survey**

Suggestions

- Are staff (i.e., teachers, co-ordinating adults) able to greet parents specifically?
- Can staff (i.e., teachers, co-ordinating adults) pronounce our family's names?
- Do staff (i.e., teachers, co-ordinating adults) know my child's interests/strengths/daily routine?
- Do they know as much about my family as I want them to know?
- Do they know what I (a parent, whanau member) can contribute?

1.2 **Staff survey (i)**

- Each staff person (i.e., teachers, co-ordinating adults) takes a random group of children and writes down a list of their interest/strengths/daily routines.

1.3 **Staff survey (ii)**

- After an event/an episode/a day:

  What did I find out about how one/two/several child(ren) were today? Their mood, their interests.

1.4 **Teacher/co-ordinating adult peer observation, and self-evaluation**

(To be used only in centres where appropriate to the staff/teachers/adults involved, and in terms of adult-child ratios)

At arrival time at the centre:

One staff member (teacher/co-ordinating adult) observes another (with her/his prior agreement and consent) and records a narrative/running record of the staff member's (teacher's/co-ordinating adult's) interactions with others (children, parents, and other family members).

This could be a reciprocal arrangement, with pairs of staff/adults observing each other on different days.

The staff members (teacher/co-ordinating adults) then evaluate the written records of their own (not their peer's) interactions, and reflect on excerpts, applying the child's question 1.

Question 2:
Well-being

How do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration, so that I feel safe? **CAN I TRUST YOU?**

2.1 Mood/Involvement scale:

Mood	Involvement	**versus**	Mood	Involvement
Happy *Positive mood*	"Involved"in learning		Sad/withdrawn/ distressed *Negative mood*	"Unengaged"

Observation of selected group of children. Time sampling 6 check list on mood/involvement scale to provide. "Centre mood" survey.

2.2 Each staff person is given list of children: they record what they know about their signals of distress/happiness (similar to ART 1.2).

2.3 Self-reflection.

2.3.1 Adults collect 2 episodes:

(i) Successful and sensitive response.
(ii) An episode where they felt they "missed the boat" in responding to child's mood or agenda.

2.3.2 Peer exercise (2nd level difficulty)

Peer observes another adult using above items.

Question 3:
Exploration

Do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world? **DO YOU LET ME FLY?**

3.1 See ART 1.2. Identify what is difficult/uncertain for individual children?

3.2 Take an area of play during one part of a day and identify opportunities for the people and physical environment to:

(i) pose challenges and an acceptable level of uncertainty and difficulty
(ii) collect examples where children tackled difficulty or challenge
(iii) collect examples where children gave up
(iv) collect examples where children persisted with difficulty or challenge
(v) collect examples where children didn't persist.

What were the contributing environmental factors?

[Survey data may be numerical or narrative e.g.
(a) how many challenges did staff perceive?
(b) how many of these did children tackle?
(c) how many challenges did children invent?
(d) how often did a challenge happen?]

Question 4:
Communication

Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts? **DO YOU HEAR ME?**

4.1 Over a routine or event, with an adult present, how many children

(i) did not initiate communication?
(ii) initiated communication but were not heard by the adult(s)
e.g., noticed, responded to, needs met, engaged with?
[Data: number of children in group, number of children in (i) and number in (ii)]

4.2 An Environmental Rating Scale on centre focusing on opportunities to experience "the 100 languages" of learning (to be developed).

4.3 **Teacher/co-ordinating adult peer observation, and self-evaluation**

(To be used only in centres where appropriate to the staff/teachers/adults involved, and in terms of adult-child ratios)

One staff member (teacher/co-ordinating adult) observes another (with her/his prior agreement and consent) and records a narrative/running record of the staff member's (teacher's/co-ordinating adult's) interactions with others (children, parents, and other family members).

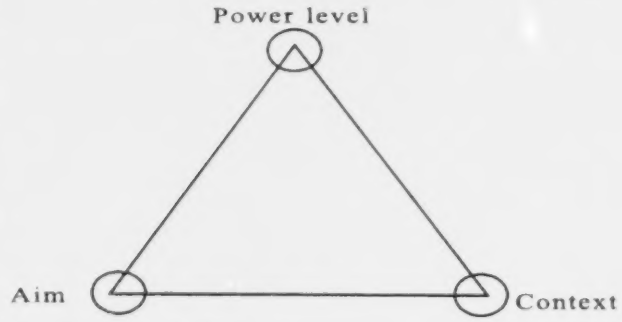
This could be a reciprocal arrangement, with pairs of staff/adults observing each other on different days.

The staff members (teachers/co-ordinating adults) then evaluate the written records of their own (not their peer's) interactions, and reflect on excerpts, applying the child's question 4.

Question 5:
Contribution

Do you engage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the groups? **IS THIS PLACE FAIR?**

5.1 Staff tape record a "typical" 10 minutes interaction and analyse the transcript for power sharing (e.g., Power On, Power For, Power With)



5.2 Over a period of time

(i) how often did we see children positively assisting other children and/or including them in group [what were the contributing environmental factors]?

(ii) how many incidents of exclusive, negative peer interactions did we see?

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APPENDIX J

Description and Effectiveness of the Trialled Action Research Tools

BEL	(Belonging: Do you know me?)
WELL	(Well-being: Can I trust you?)
EXPL	(Exploration: Do you let me fly?)
COMM	(Communication: Do you hear me?)
CON	(Contribution: Is this place fair?)

In those centres that trialled the same tool, the initials of the centre have been added:

OVP	Ocean View Playcentre
JP	Justsence Playcentre
LK	Lakeside Kindergarten
APK	Asia-Pasefika Kindergarten
CKCCC	Cool Kiwis Childcare Centre
THWECC	Te Hukanui Whanau Early Childhood Centre

See Diagram 6 for summary of effectiveness criteria re: √x

BEL 1.1 [OVP] √x√x√√√√

Each team member was allocated a small number of children to look at and think about during the sessions and try to record each child's strengths and interests.

BEL 1.1 [JP] √√xx√√xx

Six parents were allocated two or three children each to observe children's strengths, interests, and routines, using a time sampling method.

BEL 1.2 [CKCCCC] √√√√√√√

Staff recorded what they knew about their key children's interests, strengths, and abilities. Discussion with other staff.

This was repeated; a chart documented their accumulated knowledge, used for planning.

BEL 1.3 [APK] √√√√√√√

Parent survey (i): Family interests and hobbies survey.

Three questions on one side of a page. Teachers act as scribes for many families; interpreters used for four languages other than English: Hindi, Punjabi, Tongan, and Samoan.

Questions:

- What are the favourite activities and hobbies that your family enjoy?
- What do you and your family like most about our kindergarten?
- How would you like to help in our kindergarten?

BEL 1.4 [APK] √√√√√√√

Parent survey (ii): Parent expectations survey.

Three questions on one side of a page. Teachers act as scribes for many families; interpreters used for four languages other than English: Hindi, Punjabi, Tongan, and Samoan.

Questions:

- What are your child's favourite activities?
- What are your child's talents?
- What do you hope your child will learn at kindergarten?

BEL 1.5 [JP] √√√√√√√

Parents at the playcentre filled out a questionnaire on their own child about their interests, strengths, routines, and developing skills both at home and at the centre. Each parent shared this information with others at parents' meetings and they planned goals for each child.

BEL 1.6 [LK] √√√√√√√

A Learning Story book was developed for each child, containing observations, art work, photographs, and explanations about the learning and the context. A systematic process ensured that all children were included.

WELL 2.1 [CKCCC] xx√√x√xx

Observation of a selected group of children, time sampling, using a five-point scale of involvement (no criteria).

WELL 2.2 [CKCCC] √√√x√x√√

Time sampling with a group of children, every hour, using a Mood Scale on a 1–5 continuum from happy/positive to sad/distressed/negative. A chart documented the data (*see* CKCCC Case Study).

WELL 2.3 [CKCCC] √√√√√√√

Each staff person has a list of children: they record what they know about each child's signals of distress/happiness. Simple documentation charts were developed.

WELL 2.4 [CKCCC] √√√√√√√

Adults collect two episodes of their own responses to children—

- one that they would describe as a successful and sensitive response,

- one where they felt that they "missed the boat" in responding to a child's mood or agenda.

An extension of this was a peer exercise where one staff member observed another (with prior agreement and consent) and looked for two episodes as in the above.

EXPL 3.1 [THWECC] √xxx√xx√

Time sampling of four-year-olds' involvement in art and climbing activities.

Focus on two areas of play. A simple time-sampling technique used to see if the four-year-olds were using these areas.

Chart contained the names of the children and a grid for recording at 10-minute intervals.

Code: "i"=involved; "o"=observing.

EXPL 3.2 [APK] √xx√x√√x

Focus on one area of play and "morning" children only: three three-minute observations at half-hourly intervals during each morning. Staff to note:

- who were involved
- brief summaries of conversations and actions
- chart designed.

EXPL 3.3 [APK] √x√√x√x√

Anecdotal observations on "post-its" of the children's participations and interests at the water trough area; each staff to record at least once a day over a two-week period.

EXPL 3.3 [OVP] √√√√o√√√

Taking an area of play during one part of the day and identifying opportunities for the people and physical environment to pose challenges and an acceptable level of uncertainty and difficulty. Staff/parents:

- collect examples where children tackled difficulty or challenge
- collect examples where children avoided difficulty or challenge
- collect examples where children persisted with difficulty or challenge
- collect examples where children gave up
- note contributing environmental factors

EXPL 3.3 [CKCCC] √√√√√√√

Team shared what behaviours might indicate if a child was tackling or persisting with difficulty:

- a child improvising, trying out different approaches
- asking for assistance after trying
- getting frustrated but keeping going
- observing other children and then trying out the same thing later
- not being easily distracted from the task
- managing to persevere when an adult provides comfort and security by their presence
- a child continuing to strive to be accepted in a group

EXPL 3.4 [APK] √√√xx√√o

Video recording.

Five-minute video clips in one area, analysed for persistence with difficulty.

EXPL 3.5 [APK] √√√√√√x√

Observation grid recording episodes of persistence or avoidance.

Data collected across the whole programme.

Observations mainly focused on physical and manipulative challenges.

EXPL 3.6 [APK] √√√√x√√

Observation grid recording episodes of social and communicative challenge.

Modifications to grid in EXPL 3.5 allowed staff to cut up the sheet and put the recordings into individual children's summative files.

Four target children; episodes recorded where these children either persisted or gave up on communication with peers and adults over two weeks.

COMM 4.1 [THWECC] √x√√o√√√

Each staff member issued with a small notebook. In front of this was pasted a list to remind staff what data needed to be collected:

- name of child
- who initiated the conversation (adult or child)
- date/time
- number of turns
- a brief synopsis of the conversation
- any comments relevant to the context

At the next staff meeting the staff reported on their eperience of two weeks of recording.

COMM 4.2 [THWECC] √√√√√√√

Conversations recorded on a chart.

Data were collated before staff meeting.

COMM 4.3 [THWECC] √√√√√√√

"Secret Spies"

Each staff person observed another (arranged by staff liaison person for the project).

Emphasis on observing what each person did well to support children "being heard".

Observations noted specific episodes that illustrated the ways in which each person:

- listened to children
- engaged them in conversation
- responded to their efforts

A list of good practices generated at an earlier retreat was given to each staff person along with a recording sheet (not intended as a checklist):

- getting to children's physical level or, in the case of babies, bringing them to the adult's level
- knowing our children—picking up on cues
  —giving them the words
- demonstrating affection—hugs, touch
- being physically available to children
- inviting/questionning
- acknowledging their feelings
- finding out about experiences outside the centre
- having shared experiences with the children
- sharing things from home
- acknowledging different/individual routines
- sincere responding
- feeding back to parents
- feeding back to other staff
- utilising a variety of experiences—drama, music, art
- paraphrasing
- expanding own ideas
- sustained conversations

Communication strategies that emerged after two weeks of trying out this tool:

- using a sense of humour
- showing warmth—physical affection and closeness
- having effective non-judgmental strategies for dealing with conflict
- having an unhurried approach—giving children time and space to respond
- being able to bring children's home life alive
- sheer energy and enthusuasm in conversations
- frequent use of phatics
- being able to gather children into the conversation along the way
- being able to adjust conversation from one age group to another easily

COMM 4.4 [THWECC] √x√√√√√x

Self-evaluation and engagement with under-twos.
Brainstorm of specific questions children might ask as a subset of *"Do you hear me?"*

- will you come down here so I can sit on your knee and feel safe?
- will you watch me and share my triumphs?
- do you listen to my talk?
- do I have your undivided attention when it's just you and me?
- will you share information about yourself with me i.e., what you are doing?
- will you sing/talk/dance with me?

Staff concentrated on the first three questions and recorded times when they "caught" themselves in actions which answered the questions positively.

CON 5.1 [OVP] √√√√√√√

Observations of incidents of inclusion and exclusion.

Over a period of time, staff/parents note all:

- incidents of children positively assisting other children and/or including them in group (what were the contributing environmental factors?)
- incidents of excluding negative peer interactions (what were the contributing environmental factors?)

Areas of play videoed and later analysed in this way.

CON 5.2 [LK] √√√√√√√

A set of specific questions designed to observe the "family corner" for exclusion and inclusion, initially using a chart, later making notes in notebooks:

- who is playing there?
- for how long?
- what kind/s of play is happening?
- what happens when the opposite gender approaches?
- what props are they using and how does the state of the area (messy or tidy) affect their play?
- are girls using the area more because they're not letting the the boys become involved and/or is the lack of boys' involvement more to do with resources, presentation, location?

CON 5.3 [LK] √√√x√√√

A new child's question: is there a place for me here? A focus on a particular area of play (the trolleys, scooters, and carts). Data gathered via anecdotal records and observations over a three-week period. Questions included:

- how is this play affecting other children's ability to explore and use the environment? Are there any other children who would like to use the equipment who are at present excluded from that opportunity?